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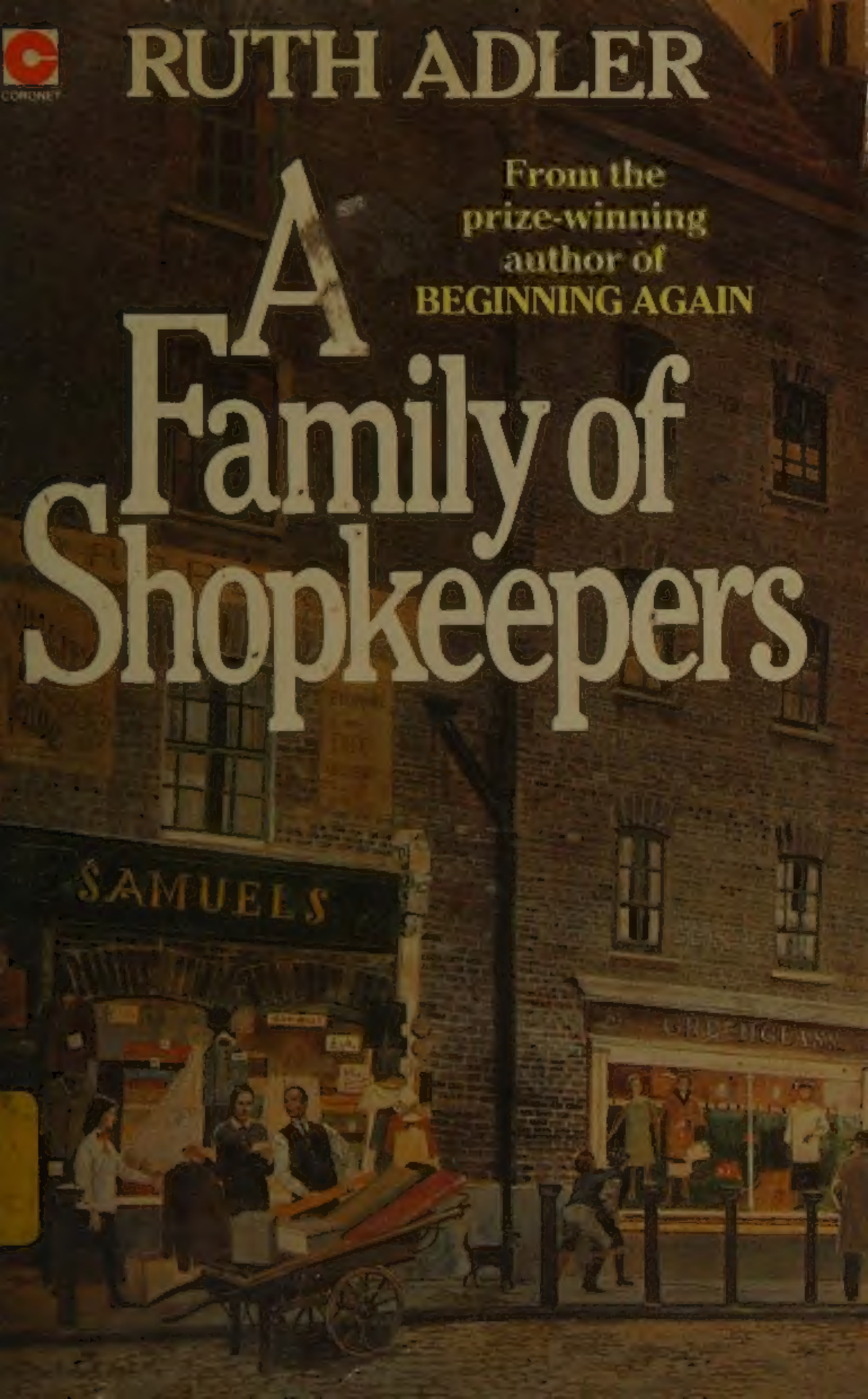
RUTH ADLER

From the prize-winning author of BEGINNING AGAIN

A Family of Shopkeepers



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Beginning Again

A Family of Shopkeepers

Ruth Adler

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In Memory of Golda, Menachem and Alec

The characters in this novel are all, in appearance and mannerism, drawn from life. Their attitudes and conversation and the incidents they are involved in are mostly imaginary.

It is hoped that the foreign words will be enjoyed by those who understand them without annoying those who do not. Many are either immediately translated or understandable in their context; the rest are in the glossary at the back of the book.

R.W.

CHAPTER ONE

Wildwood Place, where Jacob and Ada Samuels set up a home of their own again in 1921, after history had finished its little joke with them, was about half-way between Stepney Green and the docks. The docks they never saw, being afraid to venture where only goyim lived, and rough ones at that, it was said; but Stepney Green they knew well, having lived there at the top of his sister's house when they first came from Poland in 1912 with the two-year-old boy, and the girl was born into it when they barely had the curtains up. A pretty road, Stepney Green; a public garden ran down its middle for half its length, one didn't have to bring chairs out to the pavements there as one did in Wildwood Place when it got too hot to be borne indoors, and all the shops they needed were at one side of the Green and a school at the other. There was also a synagogue, but they didn't need that. Whenever she walked through it Ada was sorry they hadn't stayed in Stepney Green; a brand new hospital had risen there later, almost opposite their former doorstep, what a blessing if one should suddenly need it, God forbid (a phrase she used unconsciously, she no longer believed in God). But in the early summer of 1914, what a time to choose, she had taken the children home—to Poland, that is—for a three-month visit that the war extended, one way and another, by a further six years. For even after the Armistice it took time before husband and wife with the Continent between them could scrape together the tickets, the passport and all the visas now needed, and Europe was more or less safe to travel through for a woman alone with a child; only one had survived, the girl.

Wildwood Place had its name changed later for reasons given in the *Stepney News* that the Samuels didn't read; they'd enough to do getting through the Yiddish *Tseit* and

the English *Star*, what with the shop and the market and the housework, for by this time there were again two children, Gottsudanken, Miriam now nine, and Philip the baby, welcome fruit of their reunion and doubly welcome as a boy to fill the gap left by the first-born whose name Ada wouldn't, or couldn't, say again, referring to him when she had to as the other one or the first one, since his death back there in Poland, may it burn.

One end of the narrow street staggered off into a much broader one that didn't stop till it came out in Whitechapel, twenty minutes' walk away, where the smart shops were, and the warehouses; the other, the Samuels' end, was faced by the church in the High Street, a square-turreted, sombre building they didn't really look at because of their inhibitions about such places, and a feeling that a church was where pogroms originated, but for those who didn't mind looking, the church, and the amount of sky it commandeered round it, gave some balance and dignity to the little street it towered over. A busy street it was, cut across by still smaller streets and alleyways, its rows of terraced houses nodding to each other all the way except for the shops at the corners. The shops differed in size and style but the houses were all alike, two rooms upstairs, two rooms down, except where enterprising tenants, either unable to find a job or unwilling to have a boss over them, got permission to turn their front rooms into shops of a sort by enlarging the window and running up a few shelves.

It was to one of these, a draper's, that the Samuels came, bringing with them their bit of capital, their fears, and their determination to survive, to make a living, and somehow to wrest from it a better future, in the first place for the children, it goes without saying, but also perhaps for themselves. Jacob was cautious, seeing only one step ahead at a time, but Ada permitted herself the most brilliant of dreams: a bathroom flashed through them, a garden, education for herself still, believe it or not; no end to the fantasies the woman wove those days when they first found themselves owning a shop. A good thing her practical side could smile with that ironic half-smile of hers, such dreams—in Wildwood Place! The noise was enough to shatter them.

Lorries thundered through on their way to Whitechapel and the City in one direction and to Commercial Road and the Docks in the other. Horse-drawn carts clattered by, leaving piles on the road that steamed in winter and nourished generations of flies in summer, shouting

'CO—OAL!' sold by the hundredweight or the scuttleful, take your choice; or piled with junk, calling:

'ANY OLD IRON?' to which boys yelled back, impossible to resist the challenge:

'KISS MYERN!'

Saturday nights were the liveliest, when drunks lurched about all over the pavements holding each other up or fighting or singing, if you could call it that, or standing in groups outside the pubs helpfully putting a finger down each other's throats to make room for more beer.

Election times, which were frequent, counting by-elections and council as well as general elections, vans drove about slowly, making deafening speeches and giving out leaflets, followed by urchins in bands chanting:

'Vote vote vote for Johnny Brow—en,
Punch old Smithers in the eye!'

and their rivals would chant the opposite, resulting in punch-ups and bleeding noses.

Cats and dogs, quite well-fed, considering, competed with human beings in numbers and voice-power and what they left behind them (yes, people did that too in dark corners) but dogs needing a seven-and-six licence, they were far outnumbered by cats. Kids were always bringing kittens round to give away, and most households had at least one to keep the mice down but hardly anyone did anything to keep the cats down and they made the nights hideous with their complaints or desires for all except those who slept like the dead till a window was flung up and a bucket of water sloshed down or a glass bottle hurled at the more distant, and after a final shattering *yowl* sweet quietness intervened till the next lot.

In summer came the ice-carts with blocks of ice, bringing a rush of housewives well-off enough to buy a small lump for threepence or a big one for sixpence, and the water-carts came, spurting out slantways behind them lines of cooling

streams to wash the streets and splash the clothes of passers-by, which the children enjoyed if the elders didn't. The water-carts couldn't, at any rate didn't, visit every street. Old Church Road for instance, that ran off at an angle from Wildwood Place, was perhaps too narrow to let them through and unless there was enough rain to wash it down it was usually littered with evil-smelling rubbish, a real slum that. It was an insult to shout Old Church Road! at someone, whether he actually came from there or not. The women from poor eating were either too fat or too thin. It was common to see two children pushed in an ancient pram by a mother with a few older ones beside her and the youngest inside her, while men stood idle at the street corners there long before the depression really got going. The pavements ran with tattered, grey-faced, snot-smeared children, often responsibly carrying smaller ones or towing them in homemade carts with iron wheels that had no tyres and made a marvellous racket, from their point of view.

Some of the Samuels' customers came from Old Church Road, and once when Miriam had to deliver an order there, Ada made her wear her shabby old coat over the new dress she wanted to be seen in, saying men darf nisht bei yenem ois-shtechn di oigen, meaning roughly, don't cause jealousy. And it was the street of Miriam's enemy, a handsome lad with flashing dark eyes who wore a man's cap and lay in wait on dark winter evenings to catch her on her way from school. Once he hit her violently on the chest, once tore her coat in a struggle and once after vaccination directed a quick, hard fist at the red ribbon on her sleeve with such accuracy that she leaned against the wall and nearly passed out. Whenever he attacked her he explained that she had killed Christ, or advised her to return to her own country, or said quite simply, Yid! She had to account for the torn coat at home, but didn't tell about the other episodes for shame at getting caught and a feeling that it would upset them more than it mattered.

The Samuels were next door to a corner shop, a comparatively grand one, with proper shop windows at the side as well as the front, and dummies of children standing

about in it unnaturally well-dressed and brushed. It was owned by the Greenglasses and in time did well enough for Mrs G. to get a fur coat, one of the only two owned in the Place, at any rate the only two got by lawful means, using lawful in its usual sense. Being short and round with slim legs, she looked from a little distance like a ball of fluff bobbing along on two stems, having bought it after hems had retreated to the knees. The fur coat had a lot to compensate for, as the older of the two sons died on the verge of manhood and Mrs Greenglass had, it was said, only one lung. Her small black eyes glittered, she had a high colour not only on the cheekbones but across her hooked nose, she coughed a good deal and when she coughed her bladder overflowed, poor thing. Jacob's niece Rivka Rochel, who was the same age as Ada and dropped in nearly every day, living nearby without a shop to tie her down, used to send herself into screams of laughter wondering if Mr G. minded the smell or had got used to it over the years.

On their other side was a jeweller's, so-called, though only clocks and watches were ever seen there, and straps and chains and that kind of thing. The owner was a German, a middle-aged man living alone with his shaky old mother who'd never been heard to say a word except Happy Christmas every year over the fence where the yards were, and the lavatories. During the war they'd had their windows smashed and their stock stolen by local patriots, but had patiently started up again. The jeweller was a quiet man and slow, if you handed in your clock for repair you could kiss it goodbye for a month or two. Whenever you asked if it was ready he said, 'I'll have a look and see,' so that became his name.

Next to Have-a-Look-and-See was the carrotty-headed family Johnson with a sweets and toys shop, all three of whom had the distinction of being tall, straight-backed and well-developed in build. With only one child to sustain they too did well, more surprisingly than the Greenglasses, seeing how much of their trade seemed to be in ha'penny bags of sweets. It was Mrs Johnson who owned the other fur coat, the son grew up to become a doctor, and who in the Place could aspire to more? Very British they were, very

correct and well-mannered, though Ada always referred to Mr Johnson as a hint, a dog that is, after he refused with polite relentlessness to change a little toy that fell apart when looked at.

At the other side of Johnson's, Gilling the cobbler sat all day in his front room window performing miracles of resurrection on almost done-for boots and shoes, and at night initiated his personal population explosion. Gradually his family overflowed down into the cellars which had no windows, being meant for keeping the coal in and doing the washing. Gilling was a kind husband and father all week but when boozed-up on Saturday night would kick his wife down the stairs or knock her about upstairs, forgetting to desist when she was pregnant once, so that mercifully there was one less mouth to squawk for food than there could have been. When there were five all under eight and Mrs Gilling came into the Samuels' shop with another swelling belly and another black eye, Ada said:

'You know we need not keep on having children now, we can do something against it.'

And she said, 'But Mrs Samuels, what are we women for?'

Her collar bones stood out like rails, her sunken eyes were large and bright and she had an expression of great sweetness. The cobbler's children ran barefoot the year round except in deepest winter, when the frequent purchase of plimsolls from the Samuels would have bought strong boots for each, had they ever been able to lay hands on enough money at once; even the plimsolls had sometimes to be got on credit from Ada when Jacob wasn't there, or wasn't looking. Eight or ten they ended up with, most of them boys, all heavily built but under-sized and all with curiously gruff voices, even in childhood. Each as soon as he could toddle, pushed his big head round the Samuels' shop door a couple of times a week to ask hoarsely:

'Got any boxes?' And whether they had or not, followed on hoarsely, 'Got any string?'

Opposite the Samuels was another real shop, Smiths For Bicycles, which the owner wheeled out on good days to tempt the hearts of boys more readily. On Saturdays a few new ones glittered to advantage against the poor relations

at their back, and whenever one looked across there was Smith, legs astride and arms akimbo, the centre of keen discussion groups arguing and comparing this bike with that bike for hiring on Sunday, or buying on instalment, or just dreaming about them aloud.

A few yards to the left of Smith's a tailoring and repairer's clung to its corner, a shop so small and dark that even the Samuels had a right to name it The Hole in the Wall. Mr and Mrs Hyman, he tailored and she repaired, were both small, dark and sallow, characteristics that bloomed in their two little girls as oriental beauty. Slender children with velvet-black eyes glowing against the whites, which were blue, they inspired Philip when he was five to exclaim when they danced in:

'Ooh look, the stars are out!'

One of them was knocked down one day by a van in the High Street and the parents came running all the way in their aprons and pins, wax-yellow with terrified eyes, fighting with puny limbs and rasping breath to get through the crowd. The child was only bruised and shocked, it was the father who fainted and had to be brought round at the kerb with nips of whisky carried by ready hands from the pub.

To the right of the bike shop the door of a private house opened every morning to let five ragged children stream off to school. The three elder were girls, all blue-eyed and flaxen-haired and pretty enough to fit the popular idea of angels. They had delicate features, dainty ways and rough, work-blackened, mature-looking hands; their hands betrayed their days as the *Portrait of Dorian Gray* betrayed its owner's sins, for each, from the age of twelve or so, was sent out cleaning after school to bolster the family income. Jacob once came in from the shop brimming with embarrassed laughter after serving the youngest. She'd asked for sanitary towels (usually anyone wanting these when Jacob was alone in the shop would buy a packet of pins instead), and when he asked what size she'd looked up at him innocently.

'I don't know, you see, it's the first time.'

Next door to the angels was a greengrocery run by tiny

Mrs Harris, sour and wizened as one of her lemons after squeezing, who advertised her fruit in striking terms.

'The tomatoes are like nuts today. The apples—so sweet, you can put them in your tea instead of sugar. As for the pears, Mmm ... mmm ...' She closed her eyes and swayed her head, 'A flask of wine, each one,' which Ada said was only too true the day she got an over-ripe bagful.

There was a shop that sold nothing but buttons yet provided a living for a widow and her daughter. When the girl won a scholarship Rivka Rochel's husband commented:

'Much good it will do her. Will she speak French to the baby when she's changing his napkins?' Only he put it more crudely than that.

And finally the barber's next to the pub on the corner, where women as well as men got their hair cut; nobody round there referred to a hairdresser's, at least not then. Mr and Mrs Cohen worked it between them, beneath three large framed photographs of young men in uniform, all they had left of their sons when the guns stopped firing. Stooping, white-haired, extinguished in middle age, they went on mutely cutting hair and shaving.

'One must live,' said Ada quietly, nodding her head. But she thought they should not have hung the pictures for everyone to see.

Every morning she put six ha'pennies in a tin for beggars and buskers and it was never enough but one had to make a limit, especially as people said some of them are richer than you and me, which she only half-believed. The blind came with surprised faces and small placards that read: GREAT WAR 1914-1918; others, lacking only an arm or leg, sold matches or bootlaces from door to door; mouth-organists and fiddlers played in the gutter, an upturned cap on the pavement for coins, afterwards making the round of the shops, but if it was Jacob's he'd say sorry, he wouldn't give them anything because they murdered the music in his opinion—naturally he didn't say so to them. Barrel-organists followed each other at intervals growing shorter as the days grew longer, the more elaborate carrying tiny monkeys in fancy waistcoats that brought swarms of kids helter-skelter to dance and sing to the tinny tunes; one cranked up his

handle when Ada had just fallen asleep during illness and Jacob went out with an impulsive threepenny bit to speed him further up the street.

'Cor bless yer, guv,' the man said heartily, 'and yer missus up there an' all,' and touching his cap he moved off promptly, leaving Jacob to wonder if he'd been too generous. Suppose he told all his fellows to come and do the same ...

And gypsies came selling little sachets of lavender, making extravagant promises of good luck if you bought one; Miriam kept hers in an underwear drawer years after it had lost its scent. An old Jewish beggar came always on Mondays, wrapped winter and summer in two decaying overcoats; he sold nothing and played nothing but with beseeching eyes and outstretched hand muttered very low, 'a nedooveh', and if it was Ada, she gave him a whole penny from the till. And later in the twenties came the groups of unemployed miners from Wales to sing *Land of My Fathers* and *The Minstrel Boy* with such power and beauty that passers-by stood still and tears sprang to Jacob's eyes.

CHAPTER TWO

They were married in 1908 when Ada was twenty and Jacob three years older. She was dark then, and quick, he fairish and slow; two small slim people, the bride lively, the bridegroom quiet. In her perfectly oval face the eyes were almond-shaped, expressive, beautiful, the nose too long but straight, and a full lower lip slightly overlapped a thin upper one; a family mouth, repeated round the room in a sister, a brother, an uncle. Jacob sometimes looked mildly surprised, sometimes mildly amused, and quite often he looked lost, or at least absent. His eyes were blue and round, his nose square and chiselled, with a little bump half-way as if the chisel had slipped, and a full light-brown moustache bloomed over the well-shaped mouth and chin. Tst-tst-tst, said the relatives, a handsome pair, kein-ein horeh.

After the choopeh they lived in Jacob's small town, Prozhnie, with his sick old mother, whom she nursed, in one room divided at night by a curtain flung over a string. In spite of the curtain the marriage wasn't consummated till the old lady died a few months later. One of Jacob's sisters had married a butcher and Jacob earned a frugal living helping in their shop, whose sights and smells he never got resigned to. Ada made a little extra, crocheting for the few people rich enough to pay for a tablecloth or centrepiece, a blouse or a shawl.

It was one of those typical little market towns, the shtetl of fiction and fact, where all degrees of poverty were represented; the Jewish variety, on average, being several degrees lighter than the peasants'. For this reason, and for reasons religious, political, personal and who knows what else (assuming reason had anything to do with it), assaults on Jews were commoner than Yomtoivim, and the Samuels, like their neighbours, had nightmares about pogroms and dreams of

emigration. When Jacob's other sister, with her husband and child, joined the stream running to England, Ada said, 'Noo, Jacob?' But he hung back.

Ada's well-to-do customers being among the emigrating families, her occasional earnings vanished along with them just when the birth of the first child increased their needs. Her mother in Starnochew, five miles away, had a grocery not big enough to turn round in, and three younger children to keep on the proceeds, but she started sending them packages of food. Ada sat up in childbed to make a coat for her little sister from a dress of Jacob's mother, and so with the help of the living and the dead they got by a bit longer. This kind of trouble the Samuels shared with their fellows, nothing unusual in that time and place. What was less usual was the trouble that their fellows gave them, for the Samuels were free thinkers, no less, in that tight community where nearly everyone knew what everyone was doing, and some spied, if they didn't, to find out. From the Rabbi down they got tellings off and black looks, for Ada wore her own abundant hair shamelessly, not even covered by a wig, and neither of them went to synagogue except on the most sacred days. They didn't want to cut themselves off completely, they didn't want to stop being Jews, and the boy was circumcised according to tradition, but when Ada was observed through a chink in her curtains ironing the infant's napkins on the Sabbath, the butcher was told and he told them it was bad for business; they were family. I wouldn't mind so much, she raged to Jacob, if we really had an iron! She used a hot brick wrapped in rags. The quietest little meeting in their room with other young people was known to the whole town before it went to bed, and when she went into a shop the next morning it was made perfectly clear that the topic was disapproved of—Zionism they'd been discussing, very revolutionary it was considered then.

When her second pregnancy began she cried:

'What will we do here, we'll suffocate, between the goyim who hate Jews and the Jews who hate us . . . and what about parnooseh?'—a living? 'how long can we go on taking from my mother?'

Jacob swallowed his misgivings and left for England in

the spring of 1912 with thirty-seven shillings in his pocket and his niece Rivka Rochel as companion. They were met by her husband, who'd gone a few weeks before her, and Jacob's sister Chaya, with whom he stayed. Chaya's husband Mortcheh had doubled the size of his family after four years in the new country, and had also created, with a good deal more effort, a flourishing drapery stall in the nearby little market. Jacob clucked his tongue with admiration when he saw it, sank his capital in men's handkerchieves as a start, and displayed them from his suit-case on the market pavement as far from Mortcheh as he could possibly get.

It needed every ounce of his pluck to keep him standing there, nervous, exposed, wordless among strangers, having barely learned to give correct change, but what else could he do, with no education beyond Cheder, and experienced in nothing but selling. He hadn't a skilled trade like many of the immigrants, he wasn't strong enough or quick enough for pressing, for instance, like Rivka Rochel's husband, being slow of movement however hard he tried to hurry, and it gave him a knockout headache when he did. So he stood his ground, holding up his handkerchieves in silence, and could hardly believe his luck when they sold. With the profit he bought more varied haberdashery, and after six months he furnished the attic at the top of Chaya's house with two second-hand beds, a table and chairs, and sent for his wife and son just in time for Miriam to be born triumphantly British.

The new life wasn't easy for Ada either, four of them now squeezed into one room, and all those stairs, with a toddler and a baby and shopping to do. She cooked on a gas-ring standing on the table and every spare moment between this and that she sewed aprons on a hand-machine for Jacob to sell. Yet not for a moment did she regret the move. Who could assess what it was worth to eat three times a day by one's own efforts, and to have no fear of pogroms; oh there were dogs who barked here as well, but at least they didn't bite, and nobody bullied them to be religious, not even Chaya and Mortcheh, who went across to the synagogue every Sabbath morning. They could breathe. She was delighted with the phrase one heard everywhere: 'Mind

your own business!' It summed up for her the British way of life.

They lived from hand to mouth. Usually Jacob gave her just enough money every morning to buy food for the day, but once he went to try his luck in a distant market and forgot; through excitement, perhaps. Ooh va va ... she flew to the cupboard: a few teaspoons of tea and sugar, a little milk, half a cooking apple, and a search of every pocket produced one ha'penny. Of course she could have borrowed from Chaya, but it was against her principles to borrow. Besides, it was a challenge. She took the ha'penny to the grocer and asked boldly for semolina. He looked askance at weighing out so little, but she didn't care. With the semolina, the milk and the apple she created dinner for the children, and herself she kept going on tea till Jacob came home. Hunger wasn't hunger when a meal could be expected at the end of the day.

The real worry was her health. She hadn't felt well since Miriam was born; every morning it was more effort to get up, and a persistent cough scared her, her father having died of consumption. Finally the doctor said go home for a few months, get your native air and a rest, and she jumped at the idea of seeing her family again. She arrived in her mother's house with the children in May, 1914. Three months later, her health back to normal, she was getting ready to return when war broke out. England and Jacob were unreachable, even by post.

And neither could he reach her. Pshakrev! Them and their wars, they said it would be all over by Christmas, the devil alone knew whether to believe it or not. Now that his loneliness had no horizon he felt more lost than before; Chaya's crowded table was no help, it was his own family he ached for. He went to night school for English and mastered it well, he went to political meetings and Lloyd George became his hero, he listened to the speakers in Hyde Park. In 1917 he twice conquered his fear of getting crushed at the People's Palace for the thrill of hailing first the fall of the Tsar and then the Balfour Declaration. But the war dragged on, and in times of great despondency his imagination took over;

once he saw Ada and the children all lying dead in a row, an hallucination vivid enough to make him wail out loud. By the time the Government offered British naturalisation to foreigners who joined the Army, he was in the right mood to change his life completely.

His slowness made trouble. He cut himself so badly trying to shave in the regulation three minutes, and even in the ten they tolerantly extended it to, that in the end the officers' barber had to do him, they must have reckoned that his blood should be kept for the battlefield. As for drill, it must have been Private Samuels who inspired the phrase: he's got two left feet. How he escaped the glasshouse was a mystery, and why they kept him to the end; he thought it must have been because he folded his blankets so perfectly.

He lived through his service in a trance of amazement at the peculiar routines, the repulsive food, the boozing and whoring even by husbands and fathers; idiots, to squander their health and their money, never mind the rights and wrongs of the matter. He saved his pay and made a bit extra on the side by selling his cigarette rations, not being a smoker but a finger-cracker, they said it was as bad for the nerves as too much smoke but it was, at any rate, free; if he and his family survived this madness he'd want more goods and a barrow to carry them. The cinema was his one indulgence, Charlie Chaplin an unfailing bait, at night in bed he'd still be laughing, and anyone telling him this great shlimazel was not a Jew might as well have saved his breath. Together with his battalion he sailed fearfully to France, but there was justice still in the world, before any of them saw action the Armistice was signed. No more shooting, now kiss and make up. A choleria on both sides! Why not four murderous years ago?

His telegram had to chase Ada round her bit of Poland, it took two weeks before SAFE AND WELL was in his hands, and why she'd signed it only 'Ada and Miriam' was soon made clear by her following letter. When he got over it he sent his photograph in uniform, which suited him well and astonished Ada, and got one of her with Miriam that nearly sent him off his head because it made them real to him at last, and he thought them both so beautiful. Ada's

eyes were shadowed, her cheeks rather hollow and the dark hair, at thirty, already much streaked with grey; Miriam, but for wider eyes and a child-sized nose looked like her mother, against whom she leaned wistfully, holding a stiff bouquet in a languid hand. She wrote a few words in Yiddish on the back, addressing him as her dear little daddy, with mistakes and scratchings out but he thought it a work of genius, having last seen her as a toddling babe. He couldn't take his eyes off that picture. He'd be a husband and father again, a whole man, he'd eat at his own table; and there was still, though he didn't yet know it, a year and a half to be lived through before they actually came.

Starnochew, where Ada was trapped when the war began, had quickly become part of the front line between retreating Russians and advancing Germans. Overnight the population was evacuated to Warsaw, in open horse-drawn carts, with what possessions it occurred to them to snatch up while fixed bayonets at their doors persuaded them of the need for haste. The sick went, the dying went, and in one case a corpse, whose family had no time to bury it and couldn't be induced to leave it behind.

The journey would have been worse if they hadn't flung pillows and overlays on the floor of their cart, even so their teeth rattled at each rut in the road when they weren't rattling anyway from fright. They huddled together, Ada holding the two children wrapped in bedding against the cold; her sister Shoshanna, young enough to have a fit of the giggles from time to time; and her mother, who prayed all the way. Cooking pots and bundles of clothing and linen crammed the remaining spaces, and the brothers, Judah and Eli, had to walk or trot beside them, easily keeping up with the horses on the crowded road. Two-year-old Miriam had the croup, nearly as unnerving to listen to as the gunfire, and they stopped at a farm to get her some hot milk which smelled so oddly of acid or something like it that Ada paid the woman and threw it away when out of sight, thinking it might be poisoned. Eli sprained an ankle and insisted on being left, and they arrived in Warsaw nearly out of their minds till he turned up at the cousin's where they'd arranged

to meet, having got a lift in an emptier cart. They lived, all seven, in the one room that could be spared them until they found two rooms a few weeks later, on the sixth floor of an old tenement in the Jewish quarter of the city.

It was then that the little boy went to hospital with dysentery and pneumonia, and on the verge of recovery was given a wrong medicine with disastrous results. A dreadful mistake by the nurse, said the doctor, who was very upset, but the girl having been insufferably ill-tempered and rude from the start, Ada suspected that it wasn't an accident; a fine thought to carry about. She took him home when they said it was hopeless, thinking a mother might perform the miracle that a hospital couldn't, and borrowed heavily to summon a great doctor, who came to shake his head. When the child died she turned to stone, many days had to pass before her feelings broke through. He was four. And not long afterwards Miriam began ailing mysteriously, she was more often ill than well and once nearly followed her brother. Her symptoms baffled a succession of doctors till one of them said:

'Panie Samuels, stop wasting your money, your daughter is suffering from a form of malaria, the climate doesn't suit her.' Nevertheless she went on wasting her money. Go find another climate, penniless in wartime.

Ada's mother kept house while they all went to work. Judah and Eli were tailors by then, Shoshanna a newly-fledged dressmaker, and Ada, not trained for anything but housework, did felling or button-holing or whatever odd jobs were to be picked up in workshops. All together they earned just enough to keep bodies and souls from flying apart. After a while Ada bought a simple machine on which she rolled cigarettes for half the night. Sometimes one brother, sometimes the other would take over from her so that she could rest; Eli said the big manufacturers would tremble at the competition. Let him laugh. The cigarettes paid for the doctor and his medicines, and for an occasional egg or a white roll with butter on it for the child; great delicacies that she toyed with and left half-eaten.

The adults ate dry black bread that tasted like straw and probably was, most of it; they joked about its after-

effects but were glad if there was enough to fill out their stomachs. They ate it with salt herring and tea for supper, they ate it with soup for dinner, and in between they ate it with nothing. They queued before dawn in freezing mid-winter for a distribution of potatoes which were sometimes frozen and barely eatable, and were sometimes sold out before they got to the top of the queue. Meat or fowl, when they could pay for it, was for the Sabbath day only; when they couldn't, they made a stew of bones and barley, with luck a few carrots brightened it up. One Friday night Ada woke from her bed on the floor to catch Eli in his underwear eating, straight from the pot, the next day's dinner. She snatched the wooden spoon from him and rapped his knuckles with it, shouting that he was stealing from the rest of them, and couldn't sleep for self reproach and couldn't forgive herself for years—a growing boy, the hungriest in the family.

There were better times. Once they'd managed to get a sewing machine the brothers worked at home more profitably than in a workshop. In the season there was money for more and better food, though hardly time to eat it; out of season not enough to eat but plenty of time, which also had a value. They read a good deal then, walked all over Warsaw and their beloved Saxon Gardens, and enjoyed the company of friends in the same situation. The room was often full of young people singing, flirting and arguing over glasses of very pale tea; when the tea ran out they drank plain hot water. The arguments were over the existence of God and the causes of war and whether Jews should go to Palestine or fight through the Bund, as Judah said they should, for justice at home. From 1917, the topic overwhelming all others was the Russian Revolution. Their mother, old and bent at fifty, knitting cotton stockings on four steel needles, peered up to say it wouldn't do the Jews any good, they'd be the first to suffer.

There were family frictions and irritations; harsh words were said, feelings were hurt, but there was hunger and cold to withstand, and anti-Semitism, and ill-health, which drew them all together in the struggle for survival, with the youngest, whose hold on life seemed weakest, the pivot

of their tenderness and concern. Chocolate was conjured out of the air for her, an orange, and once a doll, bought by Shoshanna's savings for a year, that was instantly broken. In the intervals between illness, the uncles competed to take her to the Saxon Gardens, in the full knowledge that she'd want to go to the lavatory every five minutes, or be sick, or be carried, and when she was confined to bed one or the other dropped his work even at the height of the season when there wasn't time to breathe, if commanded by that feeble voice to come and play.

Judah was a darker version of Ada, his heavier eyebrows arching steeply over eyes more magnificent and a nose still bigger than hers. A nose from noseland, she called it, who hardly had the right to criticise. Judah was the closest to her, in age and in character. Serious, responsible, he took a pride in his work, the same work that bored Eli to distraction. As soon as orders fell off and he could decently go, Eli vanished, returning weeks later to parry their questions with fantasies and riddles till they learned not to ask where he'd been. He was the thinnest and tallest of the family, with quizzical light eyes and a long, flat chin and the family mouth, like Ada's. Somehow he managed a kind of elegance always, even wearing a shirt held together by darns. Shoshanna, youngest, fairest and with the most regular features of the foursome, sang very sweetly when her mood was good, but a disappointment in love seemed to damage her for life. She washed her hands too often, complained of pains that daily changed their nature, and related her dreams in intolerable detail.

When Ada could find no paid work in Warsaw, she and Miriam went to stay with better-off relatives. Once they spent six months with Jacob's sister Frimeh and her husband the butcher, he whose business prosperity years ago had been threatened by her Sabbath-day ironing. They had two boys a little older than Miriam and a baby girl with rickets, called the English disease. The servant girl was promptly sent away and Ada took her place, doing all the housework and some of the cooking also, so that Frimeh could be free to help in the shop. In the bitter Polish winter they went about slapping their arms round their shoulders to make up

for the shortage of coal, but there was good milk to drink, not blue as in Warsaw, meat for dinner a couple of times a week, or bones with enough meat on them to make splendid stews, and she slept with Miriam on a bed that was a bed.

Good-natured Frimeh laughed in silence, wept with abandon, and was easily moved to one or the other. Her husband wiped his hands on the clean Sabbath tablecloth and polished his boots with the ends of long curtains, stamping out in a fury if Frimeh said a word. In an expansive mood he bought good shoes for all the children, including Miriam; the next day he complained that the flour-sack was emptying too rapidly, and Ada heard him throw into a row with Frimeh that he couldn't feed all the shnorrers in her family. In the morning she packed her bag, thanked them for their hospitality and hastened eagerly back with Miriam to the blue Warsaw milk, the dry black bread and her bed on the kitchen floor.

The next time they left Warsaw it was by urgent invitation. Her uncle Shloimeh, with a prosperous little grocery and three half-grown children, was suddenly widowed and begged her to come. All went well till the vigorous uncle fell so wildly in love with the capable niece that he almost overwhelmed her. She liked him well enough, she liked the children even more, and best of all she liked not having to count every mouthful of food. But what if she still had a husband. She tore herself away.

Sometimes Miriam was taken off alone by Ada's great friend Rachel to stay for weeks at a time in her comfortable flat over the hairdressing salon she ran with her husband. An old aunt they called mother looked after them all and Miriam was happy there, till sooner or later the sickness came back, she was taken home to be nursed, and the procession of doctors started again.

Peace came, and Jacob's telegram, and the letters started flying. And from time to time money came, to be instantly swallowed by the insatiable inflation, and revolution came to Europe, and threats of revolution and counter-revolution, all holding up her travel documents when there was money at last to pay for them, and holding up her passage when

at last she had the documents. And national independence came to Poland, being naturally celebrated by fresh waves of anti-Semitism, for wasn't the language of the Jews the same as the Germans', and another good reason for hating their guts, in case the former ones weren't enough. Ada felt the renewal of hatred in the official contacts she had to make; she saw it unofficially in the streets. The day she herself dragged a twelve-year-old hooligan off the back of a bearded old Jew he was punching while a policeman persistently looked the other way, she begged Judah to sell up as soon as he could and bring the whole family to breathe the free air of England.

'The others must do as they think right,' said Judah. 'I, for one, will stay and fight for free air here.'

'Fairy stories you tell yourself, my dear brother. It will never be, not in a million years. Not in Poland. Not for the Jews.'

When the group waving on the dimly lit platform had disappeared, she opened the purse Judah had pressed on her as the train moved off, saying it was from them all. For a long time she sat still while Miriam chattered and exclaimed at the arrangements in the carriage. All those years they'd shared what they had with her, making room in the tiny home whenever she needed her corner there, and how much of the future had they now put in pawn to give their sister and her delicate child luxuries for the journey.

But the money wasn't destined to be spent on luxuries. A rail-strike in Austria held them up for a fortnight, there were telegrams to send at the beginning and end of it, and food at a restaurant to pay for in between. Some restaurant. Its gaunt proprietor turned Judah's note over and over and had to wait for the bank to open before he could give her the change; the main meal daily was watery soup in which a slice of potato swam all alone; for the sake of the potato she ordered, like a millionaire, two portions for both of them at every meal.

When the trains ran again it was not from there, but two and a half miles further up the line. There was no transport and the passengers had to walk it carrying their luggage, and quickly, the train wouldn't wait and nobody knew

when there'd be another. Ada struggled along with two cases and a bag till Miriam sank to her knees. She looked round wildly and two men stepped forward who carried her cases as well as their own, leaving her with Miriam and the bag. When she'd carried both for half a mile she stopped. The bag held Miriam's wedding gift from her grandmother, presented ahead of time just in case, she'd said; a large square pillow in a fine cotton cover that she'd embroidered exquisitely and button-holed by hand, under that a red one, also removable for washing, and inside the last was the precious down she'd started to gather when the news reached her, seven years before, that a grand-daughter was born. Ada sighed, and threw it away.

The train had waited, but there were passengers who maintained that someone had cast ein horeh on their journey, for in a long tunnel the last carriage caught fire, and though it was soon put out, a man was carried through on a stretcher at the next halt. Ada quickly turned Miriam's head to the window, and a woman got hysterical, for the blanket that tucked him in showed not his face but his boots. But after that the evil eye must have looked elsewhere, for they finished the journey in peace.

Jacob and Mortcheh went to meet them at Victoria, but there was some muddle about the time and they weren't on the expected train. Dismayed, they hurried back to Rivka Rochel's, where the home-coming was arranged, and there they were, his wife and daughter, in the small parlour crammed to the door with his niece and her husband and their little girl Sarah and their fat landlady with her thin husband, neither of whom had the sense to leave when he and Mortcheh came in. He cried out Ada and she cried Jacob and they fell into each other's arms after the six years, but didn't embrace long for shyness before so many people. He drew Miriam on to his knees and gave her a packet of chocolate and knew himself to be the happiest man in the world, if only the boy had come back too

In the evening they went to Chaya's, where a celebration supper was ready; they'd be living with her again till they found their feet. She and Mortcheh had moved from Stepney

Green to a bigger house with a proper shop in a corner position in Black Bull Lane, off the Mile End Road; they were prospering. There was another crowd to face there, not just the family, but the tenants who'd left to make room for him and Ada, and neighbours who dropped in to get news of home, meaning Poland, from the new arrival, and Rivka Rochel and Yossel with their Sarahleh, who couldn't keep away from such a simcha though they hadn't been invited. After a while Jacob beckoned from the door and Miriam at once got up and went for a walk with him along the Mile End Road as far as Whitechapel. He couldn't believe it was real, to be walking and talking with his daughter, who spoke like a serious-minded adult through having spent so little time with children; and he couldn't forget, he'd never forget, the way she'd slipped out after him without hesitation, without a word being said.

By the time he and Ada were alone in their room he was so intoxicated with joy and so exhausted by excitement that he couldn't do what he'd thought so long of doing, but neither of them minded, it was enough to be together. They lay talking and talking, especially Ada, she being the greater talker and having lived through more, till they talked themselves to sleep when the night was nearly over.

CHAPTER THREE

When Jacob put his shutters up for the first time he came in to say:

'How lucky I am that this is not Selfridges—just imagine, Ada, how tired poor Mr Selfridge must get every night, putting up all *his* shutters!'

Laughter murmured behind his closed lips, not a chuckle, more a smile with musical effects; he rarely laughed out loud. He was elated that night, so was she, counting up their first day's takings. Not bad for a start, they'd make a living, a better one than ever before. He put a hand to her breast but she held him off, indicating, with her head that Miriam could see. Here they were in their own kingdom after all the wandering, with their own shop, their own home, their own family all together; the baby was eight weeks old. The shop was in the centre and overflowed the rest, opening every day and all day except Thursdays and Sundays, when the shutters went up at one to oblige the law, and the street door was left on the bell another hour or so, to oblige the customers and to get a few more shillings in the till. Sleeping with one eye half-open, Jacob called it.

They sold underwear and nightwear, masculine and feminine, blouses and shirts and woollies of all kinds, and children's sizes in everything; and scarves and belts and ties and stockings—oh, the tsooress they had from stockings when silk ones, that laddered, came into fashion. They couldn't cram everything into the window, so Jacob printed in his best block letters one of those If You Do Not See What You Want notices that had always appealed to him for its poetry as much as its meaning. Ada made notes in Yiddish when asked for something that wasn't in stock, but he said there wasn't room for every nonsense people took it into their heads to want, and she said they should get whatever people wanted, that was business.

'Ribbon? Feh! To mess about measuring a yard for a penny takes longer than selling a vest for two and elevenpence three-farthings. And you can be sure they would bring it back to you two weeks later, crumpled up and dirty, saying you gave them the wrong colour.'

'Aha!' Her face was bright. 'But while we measure off ribbon for a penny, the customer looks round and sees the vest for two and elevenpence three-farthings that she might not have thought of buying when she came in!'

This argument got her not only ribbon, a glass-fronted little cupboardful, but tape and elastic and shoe laces and heaven knows what; he couldn't even remember it all. In time they put up shelves in the middle cellar for the overflow of stock, and for summer goods in winter and the other way round. It meant a lot of running up and down, customers naturally always wanting whatever had just been put away downstairs; later still, stock was also kept in the bedroom Miriam shared with Philip when he got too big to sleep with his parents, and once when they got fed up with the stairs, Jacob put shelves over the sofa in the kitchen, which made Ada so much more unhappy than climbing stairs that he took them down again within a month. But all that was still to come. To begin with they had barely enough for the shop itself to look decently filled.

He took the shutters down at seven in the morning and turned the Open-Closed sign the right way on the door for people rushing in on their way to work, or before a child was dressed for school, for something they were suddenly short of. Ada fed the baby, got the fire going, gave Miriam her first call and hurried round the corner to get fresh rolls for breakfast and a piece of meat for dinner. They took it in turn to eat so that one of them was free to serve, then Jacob put on his cap, folded a scarf round his neck and pushed his barrow out of the yard through a gap specially created in the fence, across Greenglass's next door, nice of them to allow it, mentshlich, they could have said no. He took the bar off the wide wooden doors in the outer fence, Ada slotted it back behind him, and he wheeled the barrow round the corner to Wildwood Place. Together they loaded it up with bundles taken off the shelves.

'You leave me behind with an empty shop!' She pointed to the gaps. 'It is not nice, like missing teeth.'

'And what would be the point of going to market with an empty barrow?'

Off he trudged, the little man, behind his load; an ant with building material many times its own size. Every morning he stood in the market, Sunday morning also, and Saturday he was there till the end of the day. So Ada was left alone with the shop before she knew the English for everything in it, let alone the Cockney. The customers taught her by pointing and saying, and soon she recognised words like petticoat, spoken peh-ee-co. When English eluded her she threw in Yiddish and Polish, and if altogether at a loss used her eyebrows and hands. One way or another she got through to her customers. However small the purchase there was always a bright smile for them, nothing was too much trouble; up and down the ladder she climbed, up and down the counter. If they complained of the price she examined the code, allowed hesitation to play across her features, and reduced it with a sudden change of expression that told them plainly the decision was against her better judgment but she was, for their sake, willing to give way. And if after all she didn't have what they wanted, she said sorry with real sorrow, and please come again, we will try to get it for you.

In between customers she prepared the dinner in a series of forays, anything already cooking had to be moved off the gas or the fire before she went out to serve, or away from the fire side of the oven, or it might burn, and sometimes did when she forgot—a chorben!—or soup boiled over and made an awful mess. If it was on the fireplace she had to let the fire die down and get the blacklead brushes out straight away, otherwise borsht, for instance, or barley, would get baked on for life; no, far better to bring things back to the boil when she came in, then down to simmering point, several times a morning, than serve in the shop with her head in the kitchen. Impossible to guess if it was going to be slack or busy. If she arranged to free herself from cooking nobody came, not even a dog, she said; not that she sat idle, there was always mending to do or a piece of crochet

on the hook. Occasionally she prepared the next day's dinner at night, but really there was quite enough to do then without cooking as well, and anyway how many dishes can be made in advance and reheated without spoiling. Tinned stuff was suspect, Jacob called it poison, so were sausages or anything fried, they'd started getting indigestion, especially she; and when they tried having dinner in the evening so that she could get it ready peacefully when Jacob was home to serve, they found a big meal didn't suit them so late, and changed back to the middle of the day.

A three-course dinner it had to be. The soup or forshpeis, the main dish, the compote, even on Saturday when it was so hard to produce it, alone all day with the shop and the child till Miriam was old enough to give a hand, and even then. If they didn't eat well now they could afford to, what was the sense of having burdened themselves with a shop, they could have gone on in Chaya's two rooms, on what Jacob could squeeze out of the market, or even stayed in Poland living on salt herring between a Sabbath and a Sabbath, and at least had a day in the week to themselves. She missed those Sabbaths of the past, missed the sense of leisure, of everyone calmly at home all day in their clean clothes. To Rivka Rochel she said:

'Doo iz kein Shabbes, kein Yomtov, doo is nor doos bisseleh fress,' meaning, more or less, there's no Sabbath here, no holy day, only a pile of grub. And the joke—a bittereh gelechter—was that after all the thought and effort she put into those tasty, nourishing, freshly cooked meals, none of them apart from herself ate as much as she thought they should, not even the baby; she was the only one getting any fatter. Philip's mid-morning feed was often interrupted, and if Jacob was at the warehouse, the afternoon one also. It was worse than being interrupted while cooking. She leaned over the sofa to suckle him, and if the bell went she had to pull the breast away and cover herself up and go out to serve with his cries in her ears so that she got confused and gave wrong change in her hurry to get back to him, or said she didn't have what they asked for when she had, and what a pang it cost her when she discovered a mistake, such small profits they made, competing with the shop in

the High Street. After a while the child stopped protesting when she left him but was unwilling to go on sucking when she came back and had to be coaxed, and still needed coaxing when weaned on to solids; for years it went on, he played around with his food as Miriam used to do.

'Like birds they eat, all three,' she told Rivka Rochel, 'but, how say the English? Mustn't grumble. At least Miriam has good health since she came back to England. A prophet, that doctor of ours in Warsaw.'

'Alevei veiter,' said Jacob's niece; may it go on the same way.

Rivka Rochel always looked in on her way to the market in overall and slippers, an old coat thrown on if it was cold. Friday mornings, when she bought fish for both households, or fowl, she came back smothered in feathers or scales, and putting her purchase down on the table, unwrapped the newspaper with a flourish, saying if it was fish:

'See how fresh it is, it bursts with blood! He swore, the fisher, by his children's lives he swore to me, that only yesterday it was swimming in the sea.' And with fowl came the report that only yesterday it was running round the farm. 'And you will never believe me how cheap it is. Not only tuppence a pound less than the shop, but I made him take sixpence off the reckoning at the end. I was walking away already but he called me back. And from the shop would we get it as fresh as this? Never in life!'

Ada said tst-tst-tst in praise of the bargain, divided it with her chopper and settled the account. At this point Rivka Rochel was yawning her head off, and Ada knew what it meant.

'You are hungry, yes? Noo, sit down, eat something, an egg? a piece of cheese? I go to boil the kettle for tea—excuse me, a customer comes. Eat, cut yourself some bread and butter.'

'Oi Adashee,' said Rivka Rochel, 'long may you live, it makes me such pleasure to eat with you, alone at home is not at all the same thing.'

Not only my company makes her pleasure. Would it only einmool in a yoivel, once in a lifetime, that is, fall

into the woman's head to dip a hand into her shopping bag what stands next to her bulging with cheap food from the market! No. Yenem's is better. She saves me ninepence and eats for a shilling. Yet who can blame her, poor thing, that husband of hers banks more than he gives her and already by mid-week she must borrow from me ten shillings ... let her eat in peace. And because she'd grudged it at first, she pressed the food on her companion still more urgently. She was fond of the dark-skinned, pear-shaped, exuberant little woman, if she didn't come in she missed her. She'd sit there chattering till the last possible minute and then jump up.

'Is that the time, oi! He'll murder me!' and grabbing her shopping she rushed out. Yossel expected to find his dinner steaming on the table as he walked in through the door; a piece-worker, his time was money, her life wasn't worth living the day she kept him waiting.

'You know what he did to me,' she said heatedly next day. 'The whole plate dinner he fluskett down on the floor! Imagine the job I had to clean it up, mixed through and through with bits of china. To tell the truth, the potatoes weren't soft enough. A whole mountain I peeled when I got indoors, and I flung them in the saucepan and boiled them so fast they nearly pushed the pot off the stove.' She burst out laughing. 'You should of seen me when I heard his key in the door, mashing and mashing with all my strengths, and still they were raw in the middle!'

And it wasn't the first time. Once he'd not only broken the plate but rushed out giving the door such a zets, she told Ada, that the lectric fell down, and a sheineh reineh kapooreh oif em, serves him jolly well right, that is, what it cost him to mend it.

'Noo, Ada, you don't ask why he threw the dinner down that time?'

'Yes, Rivka Rochel, why did he threw his dinner down that time?'

'Listen. We sit ourselves round the table, me and Sarah and him, and what does God do?' Her voice began shaking. 'Punkt his portion meat has to have a bit of newspaper still sticking to it—and it helped nothing,' she shrieked, holding

weakly on to Ada's arm, 'when I showed him, black on white, that it was a Yiddish paper, not a goyisheh!'

When they'd wiped their eyes and could talk normally again, Ada said:

'You will excuse me, yes, if I tell you, Rivka Rochel, that it is not right from you? The whole morning is your own, no baby, no shop, you could clean well the meat and cook everything as it should be, if only you did not stop for a mootel so often.'

Talk to the wall, for the difference it made. What would life be worth without a gossip, if not with Ada then with the next-door neighbour or the landlady downstairs. She should give up her little pleasures for him? A krenk oif em! —she wished him no good.

With Ada it was a point of honour that dinner was ready for Jacob coming from the market and Miriam coming from school; and a disgrace if it was even slightly spoiled. Husband and daughter ate at the table, she at the wide shelf fixed next to the shop door which had a little window to see through, and it was she who got up to a customer in the middle of the meal, not minding as much as Jacob would if it cooled. This was her place, this corner between the shelf and the window, here she cooked and mended and read the *Tseit*, all with one eye on the shop, so that even when it was closed and in darkness she still sat there, unconsciously glancing through the little window. When it was pointed out she moved, laughing, to the sofa or the table, later to find herself somehow back in that corner, and thought with vexation of the story of a lion set free after many years in a cage, who went on pacing the same area as before.

After dinner Miriam ran back to school, the baby was put to sleep upstairs, and Jacob wandered about turning over a cushion, moving aside a newspaper, till Ada said with her ironic half-smile:

'You search for something Jacob?' knowing quite well what it was.

'Yes, where did you hide away the tea-towel?'

'It hangs in its place, where it always hangs!'

She washed up in hot water saved from the potatoes or

lokshen, rinsed the things in clean cold water, and wiped most of the wetness off with a dish-rag before putting them on the table. Jacob insisted on drying, though privately she wished he wouldn't, he took so long polishing each piece till it shone back and front like a mirror that he got in her way before the end. But he was convinced he was a great help, and she let him think so, valuing the effort more than the result. What other man stirred a finger in the kitchen? By the time he laid down the last glittering spoon with a sigh she'd put everything away, cleaned the sink, tidied herself up and changed her dirty overall for a clean one. He draped the tea-towel over a chair and she retrieved it and hung it up on its hook.

'Ada, go up and have a rest. I'll see to the customers.'

'Go you, Jacob.'

This was the after-dinner ritual, with variations.

'Adashee,' and he uttered his murmuring laugh. 'You will never guess what I am about to propose?'

'Yes—go up and lie down!'

They wrangled a little over this, each on behalf of the other, but most afternoons it was he who climbed the stairs to bed, and when he came down a couple of hours later, she snatched twenty minutes on the bed if the child was still sleeping, or ten on the sofa, before Miriam came home and it was time to make the tea. Now Jacob had time and energy for his son. Lying on the sofa he let the baby crawl over him to examine his eyes and ears and poke a finger in his mouth, or he dangled a length of string to get antics from the kitten that amused him as much as Philip. Sometimes when the child was crawling on the floor he pushed a rolled-up scarf or a small cardboard box under the back of its jersey, which amused only him; Philip squirmed helplessly and Ada was annoyed.

'What is with you, making fun of the child!' She got up and removed the object, and he coloured slightly, but after a time he couldn't resist doing it again.

Often he held Philip in his lap at the table, while drinking his tea and reading the paper at the same time. Half-way through the large cupful he once found a small fine-toothed comb and a few rusty nails, and throwing his head back he

laughed out loud, surprising Ada and Miriam into joining in before they knew why, and startling the baby so that he burst into tears. Ada took him in her arms to comfort him and turned a brimming face to Jacob.

'See what a mistake it is to read and eat at once? A fine thing, for someone who will not leave food uncovered for a second in case, God forbid, a speck of dust flies in!'

Twice a week Rivka Rochel joined them at teatime on her way from Ben Hur's cinema. She never missed a programme, she'd sooner have missed her dinner, but at threepence a seat she could afford to have both; and each time she assured them that never in life had she seen such a marvellous picture. She enjoyed it if it was funny and she enjoyed it if it was sad, claiming in each case that she'd welled over from one end or the other, though only the wet hanky was produceable as evidence. In between customers she told Ada, who listened, and Jacob, who didn't, about *Over The Hill*, where a poor old woman was sent to the workhouse by her rich, stuck-up children, and they wondered aloud if it could happen to them.

When Sarah came home from school and found nobody there she knew where to look for her mother.

'Must you run after me—you could of waited at home a few minutes.'

Sarah flared up. 'You told me yourself I should come to Auntie's for tea!'

'*I* told you? No, I ...'

'Yes you did, you liar!' Sarah's dark blue eyes bulged with rage, the colour came and went in her transparent skin. Rivka Rochel jumped up with her hand raised.

'In a minute will I give your face such a smack!'

Ada got between them. 'Shah, shah, come and sit down, Sarahleh.' She cleared a place at the table and started cutting up bread. 'Is it right to speak so to the mother?' (But how could the child show respect, she thought, if the father didn't.) 'Noo, make a start.' Sarah devoured five or six slices with butter and jam, several biscuits and two cups of tea before she sank back and said no thank you to offers of more.

'A pleasure, to see a child who eats,' said Ada.

'And where does she hide it? Eats like a horse and stays like a loksh.' She turned to Miriam. 'Why don't you come sometimes to us for a tea, only once you have been, no?'

'Mmm ... mmm,' said Miriam. That once had been enough; Yossel came home early from work and said nastily, 'Hey, Pilsudski, you eat too much,' when she was reaching for her first slice of bread.

With Jacob on duty Ada could do her own shopping, taking Philip in his pram if it was fine; as soon as he trusted his legs to carry him he insisted on pushing it all over the pavement, and it suffered early banishment to the cellar. Or she went up to clean out a bedroom, or down to do some washing, but had to keep breaking off, bless the man, as soon as he had more than one person to cope with he called for her help.

'You manage without me in the market, why not here?'

'I wish I had you in the market as well!'

By the time the shutters were up the supper was on the table. Ada fed Philip and encouraged the others.

'Eat, eat ... another piece of chopped fish, Jacob? Do not say no! Miriam, take more bread and butter. Look, there are tomatoes on the table!'

Jacob read over meals whenever he could, and Miriam had begun doing it as well. Ada said to the world in general, 'Nobody sees what they eat, nobody knows what taste it has.' Or she said specifically to Jacob, 'You want the dinner put in front of you boiling hot, then you read the paper and let it get ice-cold.' At supper she protested, 'It is the one and only time of day when we sit down together round the table, and if you read can I say *not* to Miriam?' Sometimes she burst out, 'Let me hear a word, it is not a library here! I should thank God, perhaps, that Philip cannot read yet.'

Then Jacob laid aside his paper and Miriam her magazine, and a few days later they crept back to the table. She bit her lip and said nothing for a time. A little praise for the food was all she wanted, a little news of the day, but neither father nor daughter was very chatty, it was she who did

the talking when she could get them to listen.

When Philip was put to bed they went into the shop to make order and to count the takings, mostly in silver and copper on weekdays, very few notes came in before pay-day, and on Thursdays Jacob was always disappointed, only ten shillings, if that, in the till.

'What is with you, mentsh einer? We do not yet go broke!'

The takings were entered on a sheet of white cardboard removed from a parcel of vests or pants. Jacob ruled it off vertically to keep the rows of figures separate, and drew a horizontal line under each week's total till the sheet was filled up and they started a new one, getting muddled and upset if they forgot to date it. And warehouse deliveries were unpacked then, Jacob unravelling every knot in the string while she stood by impatiently with the scissors he wouldn't use. They exclaimed at the beauty and quality of the brown paper wrapping, and folded it away for big customers only, small ones got newspaper or nothing. They checked the contents, came to an agreement on the selling price and made tickets for each article in the secret code (a nought in front of the cost price, and a nine behind, and who could possibly guess what it meant?) They allowed a profit of a third to start with, but dropped it if anyone bated them down, to a quarter, a fifth or still lower, anything to win a new customer or keep an old one from going round the corner. Where to put the new stuff was argued with passion. Ada's passion being the greater she usually won, and he moved it some other time, when she wasn't about.

'Where are those army socks, Jacob, we had them here, opposite the money drawer?'

'I found a better place for them.'

'Where, tell me where?' But he couldn't remember where; they hunted them for hours.

'You must tell me in the same minute as you move a thing,' she said angrily. 'I had to send a customer away empty-handed this morning.'

Sending a customer away empty-handed was a crime, and he was upset. 'But one need not raise one's voice!' he said, raising his.

When it blew over he did the same thing again. The shop was big business compared with the barrow, and he couldn't adapt himself. He'd come home from the warehouse with a new line, a bargain.

'Wonderful! How many did you bought?'

'One.'

'You mean only one dozen?'

'No, I mean only one piece.'

'Turn round, go back and buy a couple dozen at least!'

'What? And if it does not sell?'

'In business one must be ready to take a risk. But I say it will sell, they will snatch it from our hands.'

No, he must think it over. He thought it over, lying awake half the night.

'All right Ada. I go for a few more.' But the whole lot had been snapped up. Mr One-Twelfth they called him at the warehouse.

Once a week they held a business conference with Mortcheh and Chaya after supper, either in Black Bull Lane or in Wildwood Place. If they went there they took the children with them, putting Philip to sleep in his pram till he outgrew it and had to be carried, by Ada; he was too heavy for Jacob. Miriam skipped alongside, happy to be seeing Sammy again. Sammy was the youngest of the four boys and when she lived there they'd been inseparable, sometimes teaming up with the two brothers from the grocery, more often content to play without them. He was a plump little daredevil with golden brown eyes gazing out of an impassive face, a year younger than she was but far more experienced. He'd taught her cricket out in their back yard with stumps chalked on the brick wall; he'd taught her how to catch tiddlers in a jam-jar in Victoria Park, and how to fool one's parents after a mishap by appearing calm and unconcerned so that they went away and gave you a chance of putting things right if you could or getting rid of the evidence if you couldn't. Sarah complained to her mother at the time that they wouldn't let her join in their games, and Rivka Rochel had said to Ada, then in her last weeks of pregnancy with Philip:

'Your Miriam likes only to play with boys!'

After a moment's silence Ada said, 'Uz men hot kinder in de veegen, lost men leiter tsufreeden,' meaning roughly, if you've still got children of your own to bring up, better not criticise someone else's.

Rivka Rochel hastened to say she'd meant nothing bad; she sticks a knife in one's heart, thought Ada, and means nothing bad.

Philip's birth was a forceps delivery, she'd been in bed a month getting over it, and with neither mother in a position to take much notice, Miriam and her cousin ran the streets that August, free as a pair of wild birds. During a heat-wave they went out in the yard in swimsuits to throw buckets of cold water over each other, keeping on long after the joy had gone out of it and only the shock was repeated, each preferring death to surrender, till the eldest boy came out and made them stop it. Soon after this Sammy was put to bed with a very high temperature and pains in the limbs. One morning on waking he couldn't straighten himself out and screamed when his mother tried to do it. Rheumatic fever, the doctor said, and ordered him straight to hospital. Miriam followed when he was carried down on a stretcher still curled in the same position, and he turned his set face away from her, ashamed, at seven, of the tears trickling across the top of his nose. She went on staring up the road after the ambulance had driven off with his mother sobbing beside him till the grocer's wife noticed and led her into the house by the hand.

He came home with a slightly damaged heart and subject for a time to night terrors, waking with hoarse cries that froze the marrow in their bones to say there was a man in the room when there wasn't; but he was soon back to normal, ready as ever to accept any dare one could think of. Er kricht oif gleicheh vent, they said, meaning he was always risking his neck. Twice he split the fleshy part of his nose in falls, and very snub it got after the second lot of stitches, once he broke an arm, and while it was still in plaster he got the middle finger of the other hand trapped in the great mangle by Sarah, who dared him to put it near the rollers while she turned the handle, so that it was bent for ever after.

Since she'd moved away they'd grown shy of each other. He'd say hello expressionlessly over the top of a comic when she came in, and go on reading as if she wasn't there. Then suddenly he'd jump up to show her something, 'wanna see what I've got in this matchbox?' for instance, and there was some slithery or creepy-crawly insect that made her scream, which pleased him. Sometimes they played hide-and-seek in the dark of the shop till they'd raised a satisfactory number of lumps on foreheads and shins, then sat on the good mahogany counter drumming their heels against its front till Mortcheh opened the door and commanded them briefly to stop. Sometimes they talked.

'Who d'you love most in all the world?' she asked, wanting him to say you.

He shrugged. 'Mum and Dad I s'pose. Who do you?'

She'd have said you if he had.

'My granny in Poland,' she said, to be different, and at once felt guilty, the more so as he raised his eyebrows and said authoritatively:

'You oughta love your father and mother best.'

If the older boys weren't about they went to the top of the house to play doctors, nurses and patients, removing each other's clothing to an extent that would have alarmed the parents sitting all unknowing downstairs, but she held on tight to her navy-blue knickers. He said it was absolutely necessary to remove them completely, how could he examine her properly otherwise; and she compromised, pulling them down for a fleeting instant and then like lightning up again.

'Look,' he said disgustedly, '*I* don't mind,' and lay revealed in all his glory, but she stared determinedly at his chest, her sense of taboo being stronger than his and her curiosity weaker; she had a brother, after all, and knew what all that was like. Afterwards they dressed hastily and slid down the banisters one behind the other.

'Let's go in the kitchen. I've got a new game.' He led the way through the shop parlour where the grown-ups were talking.

'What you doing in there?' called Chaya.

'Nothing,' he said, which seemed to satisfy her, and he closed the door.

He laid out a row of teaspoons, each half-filled from the larder, and they took it in turn to choose, blind-folded, any two of them; whatever the contents they must eat or drink them on pain of everlasting disgrace. She got salt first, followed comfortingly by jam, but he, knowing the order of ingredients, chose for the hell of it mustard and neat vinegar, overdoing his contortions and strangulated cries till she was in hysterics on the floor and the adults looked in to see what was happening.

Mortcheh, short and dignified, had a rounded stomach, a flat-footed walk and a square head fringed with fine dark hair. His warm brown eyes were hooded, his moustaches drooped in separated halves, and so did his wide, flat cheeks. His conversation was richly illustrated by Talmudic quotations which Ada said were always apt, but he spoke so rapidly that Jacob couldn't catch the allusions and sometimes sat glassy-eyed, having given up trying.

In this household it was the husband who decided what the dinner should be, and often brought food home from the market himself. Chaya always criticised it. She told Ada crossly:

'They dance with joy when they see him coming!'—meaning the stallholders. 'They know quite well they can swindle him—if they don't give him something rotten they make sure to weigh him short.'

Mortcheh tucked in his chin and smiled down at her, showing a row of even small teeth and dimpling one wide cheek; the smile was tolerant, condescending, with a hint of contempt. He enjoyed his food, took an interest in the cooking and was always lifting the lids of saucepans to taste the contents. After the first mouthful of a meal he judiciously awarded it praise or blame but in either case ate it with gusto; Jacob said that when it was soup one needed a raincoat and umbrella at Mortcheh's table.

Sometimes he was embarrassingly outspoken. 'When that pretty little shikseh is scrubbing our shop floor,' he said with relish, 'it gives me great pleasure to look up her legs!

A pity skirts were so long when we got married—if I had seen beforehand that Chaya was so bandy the match would have been off straight away!'

'And what a mistake you would have made,' said Ada, but Chaya was shaking with silent laughter like her sister Frimeh in Poland. Mortcheh tucked in his chin and smiled down at her kindly, but when she went into the kitchen to make tea he said quietly:

'When a couple makes too much noise outside at night and I open the bedroom window to shoo them away and see what goes on in the corner of the shop door, noo ... I envy the sheigetz and wish myself in his place.'

Jacob cleared his throat and looked down at the newspaper; Ada looked up quickly from her crochet. Mortcheh, chin and eyebrows raised, was not smiling.

Chaya was small and pretty, with fair curly hair, rather vacant blue eyes and a charming nose, chiselled like Jacob's but without his bump. As a hostess she was hard to please. If everything on the table was eaten, she said,

'Oi vei is meer!' which isn't well translated as oh dear me, being more intense, like woe is me! 'Oi vei is meer, I did not make enough.' And if anything was left she said, 'Oi vei is meer, I suppose it was no good!'

If there were no customers in the shop she stood in the open doorway trying to draw in anyone looking at the window. Whatever they enquired for she said yes, yes she had it, on the principle that once inside they might be persuaded to buy something else.

How to sell, what to buy, where to get the best metsiess, meaning bargains, this above all was the topic that joined them, and Ada listened intently to pick up tips. The climax of the evening was comparing takings for the week. Bearing in mind that Mortcheh's shop was bigger and better and its position more favourable, the problem for each pair was how to avoid seeming to have done too well, without departing too far from the truth. They fenced and parried, each side trying to get the other to declare their figure first, thus making it easier to decide one's own. Ada suspected Mortcheh of being wildly inaccurate.

'First of all he does not count any coppers or three-penny

bits, I saw it with my own eyes when we lived there. And second, he does not count a big customer! If one spent more than a pound he would not write it down, saying that was not a customer but a ness,' a miracle, 'and one should never count nissim!'

Sometimes she challenged him smilingly, 'Noo, brother-in law, no nissim this week?' and he would tuck in his chin and smile down at her broadly, rarely admitting there'd been a miracle in the shop.

When they came to Wildwood Place for the evening, he sat on the sofa, his bowler hat inverted between his hands, gazing into it while they talked as if into a crystal ball. When handed his tea he turned the hat right way up so that it rested comfortably on his knees. If the women discussed cooking he joined in eagerly.

'You are listening, Chaya? How many times I told you there should be more eggs in the kneidlech?'

After the tea and kichlech he leaned back, closed his eyes and was instantly asleep, obliterating the conversation in a series of mighty snores that sent Chaya into a shaking fit. A few minutes later he woke just as suddenly, pulled out his watch, leaped to his feet and clapped the bowler on his head, shooting out with machine-gun rapidity, 'Noo-Chaya-we-must-go!'

And go they did, whenever he said so, though she complained bitterly, 'Why hurry yourself so, we have no more little babies to put to bed.'

He didn't fuss or insist, he simply stood looking down at her with that ambiguous smile, patient as a father waiting for his child, till she got up, grumbling all the way out.

The front door was locked and bolted and barred behind them, the back door opened to let the cat out, Miriam induced to go to bed at last. Was it, or was it not worth putting another lump of coal on the fire? Ada gave Jacob his large cup of boiling milk, and when he'd sipped it slowly to the end he read aloud for her in his mellow voice the short story from the back of the *Star*, explaining the words she didn't yet know. This was her longed-for moment of the day; her education.

Upstairs, Miriam always left her door open, not for the

story, she'd read it earlier, but for the good feeling it gave her, the peace; all was right with the world, her father was reading to her mother.

CHAPTER FOUR

Back and back through the Polish past Miriam drifted to her earliest memory, it must have been the first because of feeling very low down in relation to the table and chairs, she was helping her mother spread a tablecloth and had to stand on a chair to reach it and her mother, called mammenyu in those days, was singing *Chaveleh* with a serious but not sad face, it was a love song though she didn't know that at the time, nor did she know then that mammenyu couldn't sing in tune, it didn't matter; what mattered was the calm and happy feeling between them. Mummy thought, when she asked her once, that she was three or four at the time; and she remembered anxious hands always feeling her forehead and pulse before they let her out to play on the balcony muffled up so in scarves and jackets under her coat that she cried because she couldn't move her arms; and she remembered being contentedly ill in bed, it was a sofa, in the room the uncles worked in with the whirring sewing machine and the dummy tacked and pinned over its sloping bosom with chalk-marked pieces of material that grew into costumes and coats, and Uncle Eli spitting on the great, coal-filled iron so that little balls of spit bounced off when it was hot enough and when the iron banged down on the wet cloth *sssssssss*! clouds of steam rose and hid him; if he just wanted to damp a bit of stuff he filled his mouth with water till his thin cheeks bulged and he spurted it out evenly by moving his head in a circle, he let her try, but again and again just when her mouth was full he made her laugh so that she swallowed some and spluttered the rest out all on one spot; and if she cried with stomach ache or boredom Uncle Judah came to play ettle-bettle—cat's cradle they called it here in England—it was so marvellous weaving all those different shapes out of a circle of string with only

their fingers that she cried again when he stopped; it was Uncle Judah, mostly, who took her to the Saxon Gardens, a big journey in a tram, but still she loved Uncle Eli more because he was the one who made her laugh, with only a tenth of a smile at the corners of his straight lips; he'd put on his jacket, hat and scarf back to front and hold his walking stick the wrong way and walk backwards which looked as if he was walking forward, and ever since then she was drawn to people who made her laugh and wished to follow them to the ends of the earth;
and remembered guests asking where is your father and saying in London without knowing what London was or where, or what a father meant hardly, and not minding, she now supposed, because she had the uncles;
and remembered finding in a drawer a little striped shirt of her brother's, that other one who died, she didn't remember him but knew the shirt was connected with sadness, and showed it to Shoshanna pretending to feel sad, and Shoshanna saw through her and laughed, was that why she didn't like her and wouldn't call her Auntie and pretended to her mother when she was sick once that Shoshanna had hit her and heard with satisfaction Mammenyu scolding Shoshanna for nothing; and she pretended when she was ill that she couldn't feel the burning heat of the glass bottle of water they put against her feet, wanting to cause a sensation and it did; and pretended to her cousins in Prozhnie that she wasn't scared of the dark when she was—but that was a useful pretence, it overcame the fear for good and whenever now she felt frightened or shy she pretended she wasn't and it helped; and once Mammenyu made her pretend something. She was taking her to a farm to drink milk still warm from the cow, thought to be very strengthening, and Mammenyu gripped her shoulders to make her walk slowly going up to the barn, look weak and tired, she said, so the farmer sees you need it, she must have carried it off all right because he brought her a stool to sit on while he milked the cow and gave her a big enamel mugful;
sometimes she felt afraid of Mammenyu when she looked very stern, especially in company when she did quick little shivers of her head to stop her doing or saying some-

thing wrong, glaring at the same time so that the whites of her eyes showed over the coloured part; but she wasn't afraid of her grandmother, Boobenyu she called her, she was never angry and talked to her when they were alone as, if she was a grown person, all about her troubles with bad potatoes and lost hairpins, she had a wart on her chin with hairs growing out of it and she chopped up an onion so fast it was a wonder she didn't chop her fingers in as well;
and Boobenyu lighting the Sabbath candles in a pair of silvery candlesticks in the darkening room so that shadows moved about, and blessing the candles hiding her face in her hands and swaying to and fro as she prayed with the yellow candlelight falling on her head and her hands and tears trickling between her fingers, it was so mysterious and sad. Once here in London she asked Mummy to light candles but she said it would be a falshkeit, meaning hypocritical, if one lit candles one should close the shop before sunset, but she kept on asking and one Friday night Mummy brought down a little table and put it out of sight of the shop and lit two candles and stuck them on a tin plate without blessing them or praying of course, not being religious, and the electric light was on the whole time so it wasn't at all the same thing and she never asked for it again;
and nearer to now she remembered a friend of the uncles in Warsaw saying goodnight, and a heavy thud on the stairs and the women cried out, Melech has fallen! and the uncles rushed out and carried him in fainting. when he woke he said he couldn't remember when he'd last eaten and they fed him; Mummy said there was no hunger in London, she saw whole slices of bread and jam in the gutter, if anyone did such a thing in Poland it wouldn't lie there a minute;
and Mammenyu, that day she pulled the boy off the back of the old Jew he was hitting, she took him home and a small crowd followed shouting dirty Jews all the way, and when she told them the room filled up with sadness and anger and it got inside her also, it was five years ago but the burning feeling in her throat came back when she thought of it, or whenever someone said dirty Jew here;
and Rachel's house so big and shiny compared with Boobenyu's or this one even, the hairdressing part was on the

ground floor by itself and as you went up the stairs a huge framed photo of Rachel appeared bit by bit, first her straight black hair with a white flower in it, and then her eyes looking down and her face very serious and pretty; she had a short thick nose with nostrils so tiny she couldn't put a finger up if she wanted to, not even the littlest one, and a bit of moustache each corner of her upper lip and a valley down the centre, and when you stood on the top stair you saw her bare shoulders and her hair falling over them and that was the end of the picture; Rachel said don't ever use perfume, it's only for dirty people, she washed herself so much that Uncle Eli said she ought to swallow the soap and be clean inside as well. Rachel's husband had a narrow face with no flesh on it hardly and a thin nose with specs that made his eyes very small but she liked him all the same, he told stories round the table with its snowy cloth while they waited for dinner; everything was white there with hundreds of darns, the little auntie they called mother had a needle and cotton always stuck in her overall and every time she saw a hole or even a thinning of the cloth in a curtain or towel she made a little darn saying it saved a big one later; there was a thick white cloth also over the old clothes chest in the hall, they let her dress up and totter on high heels, it was lovely there, she used to get into bed with Rachel and her husband in the mornings, she'd never forget them, never;

she hadn't cried like the others when they got on the train in Warsaw, she was excited and happy, there was a wash-basin hidden under a lid that was a table during the day where Mammenyu wrote letters, she said don't tell Boobenyu about the strike it will worry her and Mammenyu pressed her arm, pleased that she thought of it, and on the boat Mammenyu pulled her off the railings in a fright and then there was the last train and seeing a sign saying to London, and then that crowd at Rivka Rochel's, how stupid she'd thought them asking which man was her father, she knew his photograph by heart of course and felt at home straight away on his lap with his blue eyes looking and looking at her while she unwrapped the red paper from the round packet of Nestle's chocs he'd given her;

that first day at school not understanding a single word till Sarah translated, but she was glad to be at school like other children at last and the teacher said after a while Miriam Samuels, if you want to learn quickly you must speak English read English and *dream* in English and she did; Daddy had thrown his head back and laughed out loud when she told him but he made her read the adverts in the *Tseit* out loud so as not to forget Yiddish, she got sick and tired of that whole family going crazy with joy because the mother had baked a cake with Simco Self-Raising Flour;

and Mummy that day Philip was born, very white and tired with wet eyelashes and no smile, lifting the overlay to show the tiny thing lying against her, all very astonishing but she was so busy with Sammy those days she didn't take much notice, what fun they used to have even after she moved away and right up to last year when he won a scholarship and she didn't, and now he was always sarcastic and stuck up, using bits of French with his brothers and even in English he said words she didn't know and made her feel a perfect fool, she wished so hard for something to impress him with but she just wasn't clever enough and now she had Katie at school it didn't matter so much about Sammy, just a sharp tweak at her heart sometimes, like catching your finger in a door, the way he'd suddenly shut her out;

but Katie also thought of funny things to do, like dare me give a ha'penny to that old gent? who looked so surprised, not being a beggar, they rushed past him round a corner to fold up laughing, and another thing Katie amazed her with was not minding if her mum or dad told her off or shouted, she just shrugged and said pooh! smiling with her square white teeth, if it happened to her she had a throat-ache for hours;

sometimes when she was reading Mummy had to scream at her before she heard, she had to take the baby in his pram at first for walks, it was so boring, he was always trying to climb out before he could walk and once she slapped his hand and a customer saw and threatened to tell; and when he started walking she had to watch him all the time and when they took him into the Infants when he was three she had to take him with every day and she made him run on his

little legs to keep up with her; pretty soon he was chalking on the floor in the kitchen and looked up to say Ber! and kept saying Ber, Ber, till she looked down and saw a B back to front and she snatched him off the floor and couldn't stop kissing him, it was his first letter; and he was always being told don't play with the kitten because he got so scratched, and once Mummy cried out oi, the cat has scratched his eye out! and she looked up to see blood on her brother's face and her own blood rushed round in a great sucking wave till Mummy said through the fog no, Mirelleh, it is quite all right, see only a big scratch on his cheek, I just said it to frighten him; and gave her a glass of water, I am sorry my child, I should not have said it; and another big fright when they were given plums on the sofa, Mummy said watch him with the stones when she went out to serve but she was reading and forgot till he'd swallowed one, she was sure it would kill him but Mummy gave him soft bread to swallow and after some hours the stone came out the other end, one of the happiest moments of her life it was, seeing that stone

CHAPTER FIVE

The kitchen hummed all day with the life of the family, serving their needs, after a fashion, with little more than the table and chairs below the window and the sofa against the wall between the stairs going up and the stairs going down. The table, dark oak and sturdy, was always in use. On it waited dishes for washing or dishes for drying or the raw materials for dinner, and after preparation it was there they waited in saucepans for a place on the fire or the gas. Dresses were cut out on the table and ironing ironed, they read and wrote at it and Miriam did her homework there when it was too cold in the shop or in her room, and now and then Ada put her head down on it and drifted off for a few minutes, and any two or three occupations could go on at once. The four of them could eat round the table comfortably. For two guests they pulled out one extension, for four guests both of them; the table then reached right across the kitchen, imprisoning half the company and adding to the gaiety of the occasion.

As for the sofa with the springs that still sagged although Jacob had strapped them from below, Ada dreamed of replacing it with a sideboard to make the room more like a dining room, but a dream it remained. Where would Philipel play when she chased him off the floor because of draughts in winter, and where would a guest sit when the four chairs were being used, and what about Jacob's sudden headaches? No, they couldn't do without the sofa and there was no other wall where a sideboard could stand. So many doors must be left free, that was the trouble—to the shop, to the cellar, to the yard, and there'd been a fourth leading upstairs to the bedrooms, but after collisions between it and the yard door, as funny as in a film but more painful, they took it away and hung a pair of curtains in its place.

Opposite the sofa was the fireplace and oven, and over that the shining mahogany mantelpiece made by their friend Abram Mitznik, the cabinet maker, when they'd been there a couple of years. She'd sworn to allow nothing on it except the alarm clock in the middle and the tins each end (given free as advertisements for tea and coffee) but other things would creep on, sewing materials and writing materials and letters for answering, all of which had a legitimate shelf in the shop; and the red glass sugar bowl and Miriam's library book and her own current bit of crochet. Over the mantelpiece the mirror with the zig-zag Japanese edges almost never hung straight because Jacob pushed the *Tseit* behind it out of Philip's reach and Miriam her *Schoolgirls' Own*.

On each side of the fireplace was a built-in cupboard. The one by the window had a chipped and yellow sink in it, one day they must change it, not everything at once. Jacob had sawed the cupboard door in two when they came so that the lower half could be closed separately on messy-looking objects; he wanted to take the upper half off but Ada said no, I want we should hide the sink away also, but it really wasn't worth opening and closing that half-door fifty times a day, making anyone sitting there get up each time—Rivka Rochel for instance, it was her favourite corner, tucked away between the table and sink. So it nearly always stood open, but useful even so, where else could the towel and tea-towel be hung?

Jacob took the whole door off the cupboard on the other side, and it waited in the cellar with the one from the stairs for the Day of Judgment to come. In the alcove they fixed a modern two-burner gas-plate, an endless delight to her as it didn't need blackleading; it stood on a nice little cupboard with drawers for cutlery that Abram Mitznik, bless his golden hands, had made to fit the space exactly. She kept her saucepans on one side of it, and bread and jams and the big biscuit tin on the other. Milk and butter went down to the cellar to keep cool, so did any vegetables too bulky to cram into the shopping bag hanging on the shop-door handle. For meat and fish Jacob knocked up a safe on stilts in the yard, it was a dissatisfaction to him for years, not being as neat and steady as Abram would have made it;

and anything needing a dry atmosphere like Matzos at Pesach and flour all the year round had to be kept in the children's room on the floor of their cupboard. To get a meal together Ada had to run upstairs and down and outside, and thought herself lucky to have food all over the house, remembering the time she'd had to buy semolina with a ha'penny.

For outdoor clothing there was one row of hooks behind the cellar door and another on the wall behind the stair-curtains, yet they would fling things down on the sofa, the father his cap and scarf and the daughter her satchel and jacket, and could she blame them, when she herself put a bagful of mending on it or the washing off the line till she could find the time to iron it. Only military discipline could have kept that room tidy, and tidy it was not except on special occasions, nor as clean as she'd have liked. Dust seeped in even into cupboard doors so that she automatically rinsed out cups and saucepans before use, while things in the open needed constant dusting but didn't get it, nor did the brightly patterned lino get the daily cleaning it could have done with; so much traffic in so small a space. Once she seized the chance of giving a quick scrub through when Rivka Rochel was there to keep an eye on the shop. Watching her rinse out the muddy floor-cloth Rivka Rochel said:

'What for you make yourself work for nothing, it only gets dirty again next time?'

Ada spread brown paper to keep the floor clean a bit longer, and took Rivka Rochel's place at the little window, where she stood scraping carrots on the shelf.

'Yes, yes, Rivka Rochel, many things we do here that we did not at home. Do you remember when we covered the earthen floors with sand in Prozhnie, and how nice it looked on Erev Shabbes'—Sabbath Eve—'when we swept out the old sand and spread on the new?'

'Look what she only remembers,' said Rivka Rochel admiringly to the air.

'We did not need to scrub there, we did not even sweep from one Sabbath day to the next. If a child threw food off its plate the chicken was only too happy to pick it up,

and anything else lay peacefully in the sand all the week, including what the chicken dropped, wandering in and out!'

They shrieked with laughter; hilarious were the old ways, seen from this distance. And how would the present look in twenty years' time? The lavatory being out in the yard meant a chamber pot in each bedroom and training each member of the family to empty their own and keep it clean; a po they called it round there, but Ada called it a poll. Did she think it funny when she found one half-full on the wide part of the stairs as they turned the corner to come down? No, she got in a rage and shouted Pshakrev! There was enough heaped up there without that; shoes and slippers and ironed things and oddments waiting to be put away in the bedrooms, one couldn't run up with every little thing separately. If only there was room for a sideboard! A walowka she called that heap, in memory of the Walowka Market in Warsaw where one found all kinds of junk; go look through the walowka, she said, if something was missing. Well, they had a house to themselves, what more did she want, with real bedrooms at last and real beds, don't forget how it was to collect bedding at night from every hole and corner to be made up on sofas and floors. A pleasure to go into those upstairs rooms now they were rid of the bugs. That first hot summer there Jacob had groaned, 'The Red Army is on the attack!'

Night after night they woke up scratching, raising big weals all over their bodies, till Ada declared a counter-attack. Every sunny day she dragged the bedding down to hang on the line outside: three over-decks and three under-decks and six square pillows and Philip's cot things, whacking every piece on both sides with a cane mattress beater till her palms were blistered and sore, and left them to hang in the sun while she brushed whole battalions out of the corkscrew springs on the beds and out of the seams of the mattresses, and smothered every inch with all the recommended remedies one after the other, and smacked with a folded newspaper at those that had the chootspa to show themselves on the walls so that they fell down dead or stunned, then swept them into the poll where a few swam around hopefully, revived by whatever liquid was there.

Three summers running she kept up the onslaught, Jacob saying all the time what's the use, but in the warm weather of the following year they slept in peace at last.

'Noo Jacob, and what you say now?' she said triumphantly one night. She was propped on an elbow in bed, dark and vivid against the newly-changed linen, her hair in two plaits for the night.

'What I say?' He looked at her. 'I say they should rather give their medals to you than to the generals.' And he started kissing her neck.

Once a fortnight she changed the bed-linen, and twice a week the towel, and now and then the unbleached length of calico hiding the torn and faded tapestry of the sofa. When she tucked in the clean cover she folded the dirty one over the end bit where shoes reached, lying down, and when the tablecloth was dirty on both sides she folded it half-way over the clean one for a time. Tablecloths at each meal now! They'd started with newspaper covering the table at breakfast, and gone on to oil-cloth, but Jacob complained it was cold to the touch.

Friday nights she went with Miriam to the baths, taking clean underwear with them; the Public Baths at first, twopence each including soap and towel, the towel stiff and grey with age or worse, the soap like for scrubbing the floor with, she said, and the maximum stay in a cubicle was half an hour, the official notice said sternly, over the benches where they waited when there was room to sit down.

'*They* should try it, getting their corsets unlaced and laced up again,' said Ada, meaning the officers of the Metropolitan Borough of Stepney who'd signed the notice, 'and pull off and put on again six more things, and get themselves dry. I would like to see what they could wash in the time left in between.'

The attendant turned on the water from outside with a spanner, if you wanted more when you were in there you had to shout. Noo, for tuppence what can you expect? Legend told of a man who for years brought his own spanner, and gleefully ran all the hot water he wanted from inside, till it overflowed once and gave him away. Not being handy with a spanner, Ada transferred her custom to the

Private Baths, where a shilling bought undreamed-of luxury and cheap at the price, considering Miriam was allowed to share a bath with her. A large turkish towel and a small one they gave you, sparkling white and soft; scented soap like silk to the skin and as much time and hot water as their hearts desired. She ran two bathfuls one after the other, saying the first was to wash the dirt off and the second for pleasure, and they came out flushed and happy to be so clean, finger-tips wrinkled from all the soaking and so hot that they had to sit in the waiting room to cool off.

In between bath-nights hands and faces were washed under the tap in the sink, for more serious business they put an enamel bowl on a chair, stripping first to the waist and then below. Miriam, till she was thirteen or so, had to be nagged to do it and afterwards insisted on a nightly performance, which Ada said was ibergertriben, meaning exaggerated. She herself, first thing in the morning before cleaning her teeth or combing her hair, took hot water out to the lavatory, the only private place at that time of day, and was satisfied that she was clean under there, not like some women who stank out the shop, men too, but she thought it somehow more disgraceful in women. She analysed the smells and identified the origin of each, the sour, the stale, the sickly-sweet and the ammonia-like one of which she said, it tears open the nose. Till short skirts put a stop to it there was often a puddle or two on the shop floor on Saturday or Bank Holiday nights. Ada wept the first time she cleaned up and was sick the second time, so after that Jacob went out with the pail of disinfectant, coming in afterwards to scrub his hands angrily till they were sore.

He was very particular about washing his hands, always before meals and sometimes between, and every morning he washed in running cold water from the tap, even in winter, his face and ears and all over his head and his neck as far as the tucked-in vest would allow, and his arms as far as the rolled-up sleeves, and nothing else at all, though she begged him to use a bowl as they did for the rest.

'In the first place,' he said, 'it is not comfortable, and

secondly it is not necessary.' He went to the baths once a week and that was that.

Philip she bathed at first in the bowl on a chair, it was easy when he was little to lift him in and out and to empty that bit of water; when he outgrew it she heated water in the two biggest saucepans for a zinc bath across two chairs, he enjoyed it so much that she had to get Jacob in from the shop to help her lift him rigid and screaming out of the cooling water, and when it all got too much for her he graduated to the bowl-on-the-chair method, old enough by then to stand and be washed down.

What only goes on in this kitchen, ooh-va-va! No wonder I cannot keep order. Never mind, it is heimlich, she comforted herself; cheerful, when flames leap in the polished grate and the kettle sings on the fire and the cat stretches herself on the straw mat in front of it, ah yes, a fire makes a room beautiful; but it also makes hard and dirty work.

Spring gave another sort of beauty to the room. On each side of the fence dividing their yard from the Greenglass's was a strip of earth that neither family had the time, nor perhaps the desire, to plant with flowers, as English people would whose love of gardens is so strong they make one round a caravan. But trees grew there, magically blooming year after year without human intervention, the only trees in the Place, survivors, maybe, of the original wild wood. May blossom spread its soft whiteness over one and lilac dipped heavily from the other, darkening the kitchen window but worth it a hundred times over. Jacob would cry out joyfully,

'Look, look, a wedding! Let's go and make a briss!' Another way of saying let's make love.

She cut armfuls for the house and gave bunches to Rivka Rochel and Chaya and the Mitzniks, and a spray or two to customers who said coo, looking through to the window, aincher lucky! And each time she arranged the first lilac of the year in a two-pound jam-jar on the table, its perfume sent her back to Starnochew and the house she was born in, where a lilac tree had also leaned towards their window, and a gust of yearning swept over her for her Polish family and friends, and even for that vanished way of life, for not forgetting the suffering of those years she found them, looking

back, more interesting than the present. And why should that be, she asked herself once, gazing past the trees and the roof-tops into Starnochew and Warsaw. Can it be that poverty makes life more interesting than prosperity? Or was it that her circle there cared about books and plays and the ideas in them and what was wrong with life and whether it could be changed, while here nobody round her had time for anything except business or housework; and neither had she. Her hands grew still. She'd had time in those days for meetings and discussions, for a study group, even for playing in the amateur theatre. Had poverty given her the incentive to care, and the time to think in, that prosperity had stolen away—this hurried and harassed prosperity here in England? Geyoogt oon geplookt were the words she thought of, geyoogt oon geplookt, recalling the slack season at home when they sat arguing for hours in the middle of a weekday, sipping lemon tea or plain hot water to swindle their stomachs with a sensation of fullness. Wherever I am, in the old home or the new, I leave part of myself behind. And in each place I am hungry in a different way.

CHAPTER SIX

Whenever the postman handed a thin square envelope across the counter she thanked him as warmly as if he personally had presented her with a jewel, one that grew rarer with the years. Jacob, a letter from home! and read it aloud, giving full dramatic value to each line. Shoshanna, her chief correspondent, began with her heart-aches and other aches and her latest dream in detail; when Jacob grew restless Ada sighed. Yes, a tragischeh princessen, my sister, but at least she gives me the news. Their mother, through failing sight and health, was reduced to a scrawl at the bottom, health and strength to my dear daughter, dear son-in-law and dear grandchildren, always the same, and Ada read it huskily each time.

Judah wrote when he married, sending a picture; Judah, her first little brother, the closest to her of them all. When the child, that other one, had died, breaking the hearts of the family, he had fainted; his suffering had helped her to bear her own. How contented he looked, how at home, with that delightful girl on the arm of his chair. The photo, its corners beginning to curl, was still on the mantelpiece when she made room for a fresh one beside it; the baby was the image of Philip at that age.

Eli was the biggest surprise.

'What you say to this, Jacob—a journalist he has made of himself! What a good thing! He never wanted to be a tailor. But he is no more at home, in Belgium he lives now, writing for the papers there. And so only Shoshanna is left with the old mother. Nebich.' She laced her fingers over the top of her empty cup, smiling ironically. 'The big question i-i-s,' she said in a sing-song voice, 'who looks after who-oo?' She worried about them both, the sister still unmarried, the mother growing old.

Jacob marvelled at Ada's intense response to her letters, and she marvelled at his indifference to his. He'd been longer away from the old home, but still. Sometimes she thought he had no affection to spare outside his own four walls. His sister Frimeh wrote that life was harder than during the war, unemployment worse, business going downhill. Then came a letter asking openly for money; there was now another child, a fourth, to provide for. Jacob said angrily,

'Is it my fault she had another baby? She didn't ask my opinion beforehand!'

'Shah, shah, Jacob. It is your own sister, not a stranger. Never forget she took in your wife and child when our need was great.'

'Yes, and sent the servant girl away when you came.'

She persuaded him to send five pounds, and it became the first of a series. Blackmail he called his letters from home, they put him in a bad mood for the day.

A letter from Shoshanna began, 'I've been shedding tears all day, tears of joy!' She enclosed two cuttings from the Yiddish press, acclaiming a first novel, *When the Mute Will Speak*, by a twenty-two-year-old writer. A new young talent on the horizon ... a landmark in Yiddish literature ... She had to read his name twice over, so hard to believe it was Eli they were speaking of. A week later the book was in her hands, inscribed by the author to his sister Ada with affection, and for once she left everything after supper to sit down and read it.

But what sort of writing was this, what *is* with you, Eli? She was bewildered. Either one sentence had nothing to do with another, or else they ran confusingly together without stopping. And time altogether disordered, here on the first page a dead woman who is later alive, and a young man, later a child. The book was in three parts, turning the pages she saw that only the first was in this strange style, and starting determinedly again, began to understand. It was the thoughts of a child, a deaf-mute child. When Jacob said it was time for bed she said yes, yes, and becoming aware of him standing there cracking his fingers, looked up to say you go, Jacob, I'll come later, and forgot him.

It was past one o'clock when she raised her head. The fire wasn't quite out and she put another lump of coal on and made a cup of tea, for what was the good of going to bed wide-awake, excited and disturbed, the novel still coming together in her mind like those coloured squares she'd crocheted one by one for Philip's cot and stitched together afterwards to form a pattern. It was the deaf-mute's story in the first and last parts, the middle one was the mother's. Poor boy, unable to please one of his family without upsetting another, his sister the revolutionary, his brother the thief, or his mother, a religious fanatic. Some mother, driving her elder children from home, would I do that?—never, no matter what they'd done. But how she suffered then, blaming herself for her daughter's arrest . . . yes, it must have been hearing her sentenced to five years, and then coming home to that terrible note from the boy, cursing her for having borne him, that drove her to poison herself. And he thought it was all his fault. Ai-ai-ai, what people do to their own flesh and blood, can we be surprised that there are wars in the world? He'd written it in despair, of course, when his girl disappeared, sent nobody knew where by her shopkeeper father who didn't want a penniless deaf-mute for a son-in-law. And can one altogether blame that father? Yet how madly in love they were, she pleading to be his tongue and ears—the scene had wrung her heart. No wonder then that finding himself hungry, workless and alone, he joined his brother's gang of thieves in the end, despite the death-bed promise to the mother, his living hand held on the Bible by her dying one. And he was right. One had a right to steal for bread.

Re-opening the book she smiled again, for Eli's heroine was recognisably herself in face and form; and once she had also thought like her, that ordinary people could stop the earth's riches being poured into slaughter machines, that food and love and thought could all be free, 'and then cripples will be made whole again and the mute will speak'. Today she found herself agreeing with the thief who said it was a dream for dreamers, and that hunger was stronger than dreams.

And yet. To this day one read of idealists like this girl,

for whom the dream was stronger than hunger; like her, they went on hunger-strikes in prison. What strength that took.

She went on turning the pages, looking for what had most disturbed her, yes, here it was, the sister saying that shopkeepers put their business interests higher than their children's happiness, ooh-va-va!—and that to sell at a profit was a legal way of stealing. And if the children's happiness depended on the business keeping its head above water, what then? And who could afford to give goods away without a profit? These idealists, they lived in the clouds.

She went to bed but couldn't sleep, wondering about Eli. How came such a young man to know life so well, the political world, the underworld, the different kinds of love and hate. She remembered his mysterious absences from home in the slack season, she remembered that night in wartime when she'd rapped his knuckles for stealing from the stewpot. Eli. He'd teased and jested and kept his soul a secret from them all.

She said to Jacob next day, 'Who could ever have imagined at home that Eli would become a writer, and such a good one?'

He shrugged. 'By me it is no wonder. You told me yourself he didn't like to work.'

She paused. 'You go to tell me that writing a book like this is not work?'

'And you tell me,' laughter rippled through his moustache, 'that it's as hard as pushing a barrow full of goods to market and back every day?'

'It is hard in another way. You find it quite hard when you must put a letter together, no? How many times you tear it up and start again and get in a temper?'

'Noo noo,' he said, and changed the subject.

After struggling through two pages he gave it up in annoyance. He had no patience for books, even easier ones than this, preferring articles or short stories that could be swallowed in one swallow.

And Ada tore up three attempts to discuss the novel in a letter to Eli. It was too difficult, even replying to ordinary letters from friends was an effort she kept putting off till

one by one they stopped writing, all except Rachel, who didn't wait for an answer before writing again. Rachel now had two little girls and sent lively accounts of their personalities, and her thoughts on motherhood, and of the Warsaw scene, economic and cultural, and have you read Eli's book, Ada, everyone here is talking about it.

One night she forced herself to sit down and reply to her. But what could she write to Rachel, she didn't go anywhere interesting, she didn't see anything worth discussing, the pictures round the corner that she went to only to please Jacob were a waste of time. Once they managed to go to the Yiddish Theatre and he'd complained about all the stairs to the gallery and the benches so hard and narrow without backs to them, one couldn't even go to sleep there, he said, and the actors so far off one couldn't see a face, it was much better at the pictures, and to tell the truth she thought the play a shmatteh, rubbish that is, after all the trouble of getting there.

And could she tell Rachel about the aggravations in the shop, women bringing silk stockings back dirty and laddered, or sending a child back with them, swearing they hadn't been worn, and if you didn't give them another pair they came and shouted dirty Jews, and if you did you were teaching them to do it again. And last week the warehouse sent the wrong goods and Jacob took them back himself, twenty minutes' walk to the tram with a parcel nearly as big as the man himself, he said it was easier than trying to get through on the phone in the High Street, having to stand tip-toe to reach it and likely to lose one's tuppence through pressing the wrong button, and if one pressed the right one there was such a roaring in the ears that before he made himself understood, or understood them ... So he went himself and nearly fell from his feet when he got home with the new parcel, der groisser held meiner; my big hero.

She'd have liked to discuss Miriam with Rachel, her good and bad points, things that worried her and she couldn't worry Jacob with, he took everything so hard; what he didn't notice himself was best left alone. Chaya only wanted to talk business or cooking, as for Rivka Rochel, no; she didn't want her child's faults to be talked about to everyone. But to

explain things in a letter, it made her head swim to think of it.

They were all well, she wrote, there was much to be thankful for, remembering the old days at home, or seeing the poverty here today, unemployment in England was also growing and they felt the effects in the shop, but they lacked nothing essential, except time and energy. Yes, she'd read Eli's book, and will you believe me, Rachel, it was the first one for years, and if it had not been my brother's I would not have read that one either. Tell me how you achieve so much, from where do you take the time, you also have two children and a business to see to. And Rachel replied immediately that she didn't work in the salon any more, they'd taken an assistant on in her place. Ada, reading the letter to Jacob after dinner, looked up at this point.

'More than once I thought lately that we should also get some help in the shop. A young girl straight from school would not cost so very much?'

He was silent.

'Noo, what do you say?'

'The shop is too small,' he said at last. 'Enough that we must squeeze past each other behind the counter. If a third stood there, how could we move?'

'But if we had someone it would be instead of me, there would still be only two behind the counter.'

'You tell me seriously that a little smarkatch'—a little snotty nose—'could take your place?'

'Not altogether, of course not. She would be with me the whole morning, and I would explain her everything then, and after dinner, after your rest, she would be with you till closing.'

He shook his head. 'I do not understand what you would gain by this.'

'I would gain a good deal. For instance,' her voice shook, 'I would like sometimes to write a letter and sometimes to read a book without sitting up half the night. And I would like to see the big shops in Oxford Street when they are open, not to look at night in the windows . . .'

'This we can do together, any Thursday afternoon you want.'

'No we cannot. You sleep till nearly tea-time and read over tea and then is too late to go a long way with a young child who should be in bed, and in any case there is only one Thursday afternoon in a week, and how often you must go then to the warehouse?'

No, it was too complicated, if she went out who'd look after Philip, the shop assistant? Miriam had homework most days, and for Jacob one thing at a time was enough, and who'd make the supper, she'd have to rush home, but she plunged on, unable now to stop.

'And I would like sometimes to go to Yenta Mitznik's and talk like a mentsch'—a human being—'not interrupted by customers every five minutes, or even just do nothing and have a proper rest in the afternoon, because I am getting very tired, Jacob.'

'Don't I say always after dinner you should go up,' his voice deepened, 'and always you send me?'

'Because by then you cannot hold yourself on your feet any more. If we had a helper we could both go and rest.'

'What?' He clutched his head. 'Leave a stranger alone with the shop?'

'Not until we could trust her, naturally. Not at first.'

'But when can one trust a stranger with money in an open drawer and goods lying everywhere? It would be asking to be robbed.'

He was right. All the time one heard stories, assistants helping themselves one way or another, only last week in the High Street ...

'... and not only wages to pay,' he was walking up and down, cracking his fingers, 'do not forget also a stamp we must stick on every week ...'

'Leave it, Jacob. I can see you are against it.'

'And dinner to give every day, could we sit and eat while she looks?'

'Jacob, it was a madness got into my head.'

'And another thing ...'

'Leave it alone already!' she shouted.

He flinched as if she'd hit him, his face went grey and he got one of his violent headaches, having to lie down on the sofa with his eyes closed and the curtains pulled as

close as they'd go while she changed the cold compresses on his forehead. Better bite your tongue off, she told herself, than let your temper out at him another time.

He was quieter than usual for a day, then he said she must get help with the housework. Yes of course, a good suggestion; this they could afford, and it wouldn't create problems.

A succession of women came once, promised to come again and were seen no more, leaving her suddenly confronted with everything she'd left for a week. Nobody scrubbed the floor with all her heart as she did, and all of them let the floor-cloth get slimy; she had to boil it in soda now and then.

'They make more beshtand than they clean away,' she said to Rivka Rochel, 'spilling and dripping and putting dirty fingers on the paint they just this minute washed, not a bit of respect for their own hard work.'

What with showing each one who came along where everything was kept and what to do and how to do it, and tied to the shop the same as before, was it worth it? With the rough work off her hands she found herself cooking and baking the more complicated dishes; the relatives smacked their lips over her gefilteh fish and the children over the butter buns, and she started making her own wine for Pesach. She made Miriam the pleated gym slip the school suddenly asked for, and little trousers for Philip, next door's being long in the leg and short in the body and altogether oon shim tahm; without taste, that is. And she read the paper through every day, didn't rush about so madly, didn't crawl to bed exhausted. Noo, that was also something.

Florrie was the first to come steadily once a week for the day; a fat and cheerful forty, so big that Jacob said nobody could get into the kitchen when she was there. The first time Ada served her dinner she remarked;

'In me other job I don't have me dinner with the missus.'

'Go on!'

'Honest. Me and the cat, we eats in the back by ourselves.' Laughter rippled down her several rolls of fat till stopped by the seat of her chair. 'Minsky, her name is,' she added casually.

Ada was upset. 'It is not right, who only is in a house should eat all together.' Ai, Yiddelech, Yiddelech, only this minute you crawled out of the mud and already you push someone else in. Bad enough giving one's dirty work to someone else to do, and if she wasn't busy in the shop she turned out a drawer or washed down the crockery shelves; rich she may think me but not idle at least. Florrie's work was so-so, corners didn't exist for her, but Ada put up with it, glad to see the same face every week.

'In me other Yiddisher job,' said Florrie when she felt at home, 'they all go to the Jewish Church Saturdays.'

Ada smiled, the synagogue she means. 'Saturdays we must be in the shop, Florrie. It is our best day.'

'But you keep open all yer holidays, doncher, even if they come weekdays?'

Intelligent, this goya, sharp as a needle. 'We must make a living, Florrie, we cannot shut when others are open. And another thing, we are not religious.'

'Not religious?' Florrie was shocked.

'No. Are you religious? Do you go Sunday to church?'

'Well, s'matter of fact, I don't. But it's different for you people.'

'Why?' asked Ada with interest. 'Why different for us?'

Florrie couldn't, or wouldn't, explain her feeling that it was more important for Jews to stick by their religion than for Christians, so she got on with the cleaning, just as well, Jacob would be down from his rest any minute and hated finding the kitchen in a turmoil.

And then she couldn't come any more, her husband had started shift-work all over the clock, they were both sorry, and kissed at parting, and she recommended Alice.

Alice was slim and pretty and washed only as far as her chin, and therefore gave off a strong smell, and apart from that Ada didn't like her because she always looked angry; a cold wind blows from her, she thought. But she worked quickly and well, that was the important thing, wasn't it? On her third visit she took off her coat but kept a thick scarf on, whispering that she had a sore throat, and started work upstairs, in the children's room, where they now kept stock. After a while the overhead movements stopped.

Could one go and look, it was so insulting, but go she must, with an excuse. She closed the shop, went quietly upstairs and suddenly opened the door. A flushed and startled Alice whipped round, adjusting the scarf; next to her on the shelf a box stood open with the lid beside it. Ada's heart beat unpleasantly. She hurried over and unwound the scarf, saying:

'You are much too hot in that, let me give you something thinner,' and several pairs of silk stockings dropped onto the floor.

'Take your coat and go,' she said faintly, waving her to the stairs. Alice took her coat and went, pausing only to mutter dirty Yids! before slamming the shop door so hard that the glass cracked across a corner.

Mrs Greenglass next door said they should have sent the police to her house to see if she'd taken things before, but they wouldn't do that, they didn't like to have to do with the police; they just went about worrying for days, trying to discover if anything was missing and afraid to have a stranger in the house again. But Ada found it harder now to do everything alone, and Florrie came once to oblige, and then they got Lily, who had to have a full-time job, and they took her on trial for a week.

Lily was sixteen and drooped like a flower on a stalk too long and slender. She had splay feet they all tripped over, and her elbows also stuck out, so that she took up just as much space as Florrie had though only half her weight, if that. She had a stutter and a squint and a wandering nose, and a big jutting chin and a mouth without visible lips that stretched and stretched when she smiled. She wasn't bright either, and so slow that in five days' work she didn't get through what Alice had done in a day. She broke the crockery and spilled the coal and upset the scrubbing pail up in their bedroom; it had a sloping floor, so the dirty water came rushing down the stairs. Ada thought of sending her away at the end of the week, then at the end of the month, and after that she thought of it half-heartedly several times a year. She loved Lily, they all did. She brought sunlight into the house in the morning, smiling and chattering before she was over the door-step. Her fair skin bloomed, her yellow

hair shone, in summer she washed her only dress three times a week when she arrived, and ironed it to go home in, and summer or winter when the dirty work was done she took a kettle of hot water down to the cellar and washed herself all over. What also endeared her to Ada was that she tried to please and didn't take offence, as the others had done, if shown a way different from their own, or their mothers'.

'S'funny you c-c-clean the c-c-cutlery,' she commented. 'We don't in our house.'

'It must get very black?'

'Oh we throws it away when it gets too bad.'

Ada looked at her.

'Doncher believe me? Cross me heart,' and she crossed it, 'we gets it from Woolworths, so cheap t'aint worth cleaning.'

'If you keep buying new it is not cheap after all. These spoons and knives and forks, maybe they are six times dearer than Woolworths, but they will last my whole life.'

'Coo-*er*! Who wants things a lifetime?' smiled Lily. 'Makes a change, getting new.'

Leaning on the broom, big feet splayed out, she chattered endlessly in her rapid stammer to everyone who came in. Rivka Rochel encouraged her, to Ada's annoyance; Miriam's attention wandered, Jacob ran away. She was always urging her, 'Get *on* already with your work,' sometimes having to shout as if she were one of the children; and in time she brought her troubles to Ada more readily than either of her own did.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Going back for his dinner on Saturday he could cut across the park and be home in no time, but one couldn't take a barrow through there, worse luck, nearly half an hour it took him to push it round two sides of the triangle; longer at night, when he was tired. The Park they called it, heh! to him a park was Hyde Park or nothing; it was only the old churchyard behind the church facing Wildwood Place, with a public garden tacked on, its railings part of the High Street. Better than nothing, they said, as they said of the old-age pension or the dole or a coat too thin to keep the cold out; mustn't grumble; why not, did it cost them anything to grumble? It wouldn't suit him, no peace or quiet there till well after dinner, not even Sundays, and as for Saturdays, the din went on all day, a wonder it didn't get the dead up, the market being just behind them. Its muffled roar rose and rose till round the last corner it shattered into recognisable fragments, shouting, screaming, wails and laughter; bicycle bells and motor-car horns and barrel-organs and whistles—a *choleria* oif zei, he cursed ruefully, screwing up his face as the full blast struck his ears. He had to pick his way, stopping and starting; only half-past eight and already packed with women zig-zagging from end to end comparing prices, or planted solidly with full bags in the narrow path between the stalls as if all eternity were theirs to gossip in, and all the road. Some of them cheeked him when asked to move, and he didn't mind that, and some swore, which he did. Mothers came and went with babies screeching on one arm, shopping bags weighing down the other, and toddlers dragging at their skirts, others wheeled push-chairs and prams in the road, noch,' why not on the pavement, for heaven's sake. Sometimes a bent old man or woman pushed a battered pram too, when one looked inside for the

child one saw potatoes there, or coal. Middle-aged and old women wore men's caps, a peculiar fashion, and black or purple shawls (which Ada wanted him to stock, but he said no, enough was enough) and very stiff corsets pushed their breasts up high enough to say Sholem Aleichem to their chins. Women, mostly women in the morning, men came in the afternoon if at all, even then just drops in a feminine sea.

Stall-holders started setting up from eight o'clock onward, each in his right place with a licence to prove it; gone the bad old days when the smaller or weaker, he for example, got shouldered aside by giants or bullies and were forced to the far ends where business was poor, or had to turn up earlier each morning to get a good spot, and still there were scuffles the police had to sort out. The day licences were given they were told to line up each end of the market at seven in the morning, he came an hour earlier and wasn't the first either. At eight the police blew their whistles and they raced with their barrows as if running the Derby, he among them, with lurching heart and protesting muscles that put him to bed the rest of that day, but he'd captured this perfect position by the churchyard wall where trees kept his enemy the sun off his head in summer; a central place, he couldn't have wished for better, and from that day on the place was his as if his name burned there in letters of fire, when he wanted to come late it was waiting for him. A grand idea, worth more than the few bob a year it was costing him. Solid gold it was worth.

Weekdays and Sundays he came only for the morning and sold straight from the bundles on the barrow, but Saturdays he had to make a proper show; purses were so to say full that day, and toys or drink or who knows what other rubbish would tempt the money out of them if he didn't. On top of the barrow was the rolled-up tarpaulin, four poles fitting into holes in the barrow, four bars slipping into the top of the poles, and the apple box he stood on to do it all, and when it was done he folded the sacking covers neatly out of sight and hung the biggest attractions on coat-hangers, with safety pins to keep them from flying away or being slipped quietly into a shopping bag when his eyes were somewhere else. Striped Oxford shirts, collarless but warm, waved their

arms in the wind, grey fleecy combinations billowed out plumply, workmen's overalls with bib-and-brace or sleeves looked sturdy enough to march to work on their own, and here and there twinkled sateen blouses in red and blue, the favourite colours, said Ada. Now the roof, yes or no? Such a job; but a sky like that could give rain, if not snow. If it did either the crowd would disappear into pubs when they opened, in drerd mit zei; to hell with them, the pubs that is. Balancing the tarpaulin between his hands he climbed up to heave it across the bars, and shifting the box along he climbed up and down till finally he stepped down to survey the effect as critically as an artist his canvas. Not bad. He changed the position of a garment or two and sat down on the box against the wall for a rest, but on his feet at once when a customer approached, with an encouraging what can I do for you, lady? Jacob Samuels was ready for business.

Considering the times they weren't doing too badly, but new needs kept cropping up, pointed out by Ada, long may she live; he could have done without them. Abram Mitznik this summer had made them a new sofa and she was happy, she wouldn't have to wash covers any more, brown rexine could be wiped down with a rag, but already she was saying what about a wardrobe, they couldn't go on for ever hanging best clothes on the bedroom door wrapped in a sheet; and Miriam should have her own chest of drawers, a girl of thirteen, not to go into the parents' room for all her things. Sometimes she saw the home of a poor customer furnished better than theirs, the rich shopkeepers. He didn't grudge money for stock or for food, but anything else got an instinctive no till he thought it over. Furniture. Noo, at least it lasted.

Around him the stall-holders were crying their wares. They used to plague him to do likewise, anyone might think his silence did them an injury.

'Hey Jacob, lost your voice?' they would say, or 'Had a row with the Missus, Mr S.?'

'Why should I tear my throat out,' he'd answered mildly, 'can't they see with their eyes what I'm selling?' Ridiculous, all that bellowing, like bulls in a slaughter-yard.

Opposite him stood Charlie with fruit, singing, 'Can-

aries, canaries, sixpence-a-bunch-come-and buy-come-and buy!'

Tall and lean, with a bony eager face, he'd got married a year ago and brought his round little Rosie out to help him. They'd stood then with arms round each other laughing and kissing, not caring who saw, and what did they do now? They squabbled without end, not caring who heard. A lorry drew up, blocking the road and blazing away on the horn, Charlie Shlimazel had the worst pitch in the market, in front of a goods depot. Jacob blocked his ears and someone shouted for Chrissake Charlie let im through, that sod'll bust our bleeden eardrums, and Charlie grabbed his handlebars a bit too suddenly, tst-tst-tst! Down came those beautiful pyramids and apples, oranges and pears rolled all over the road.

'Bladdy fool!' cried Rosie.

'You try it next time, silly cow!'

Heh, a fine way for man and wife to talk to each other. Many hands helped them to pick up the fruit, the more distant pieces losing their way home.

'Some people got sticky fingers,' said Charlie sourly, and spat on the apples to clean them.

On Charlie's left hovered Maggie, gnarled and stunted behind her vegetables, earth-coloured face clamped shut like a fist that now and then opened to howl, '*Enny*-orler-lorrameen! *Enny*-orler-lorrameen!' and then snapped shut again. The same gibberish all day, all the years he'd stood there, and he'd never known it was supposed to mean something till Miriam told him only last week, saying it came to her at home one day: Penny all the lot of mint! Yes, a bunch of mint was clutched in that skinny old hand; but why advertise only the mint? Peculiar. He stabbed thoughtfully between his teeth with one of the bone toothpicks that Ada saved from the legs of fowls.

Next to Jacob a chemist's stall, whose disorder upset him. Hair remover and hair restorer, disinfectant and scent, patent foods and medicines jumbled together in one big heap with cottonwool, bandages, toothbrushes and soap. A chemist he called himself? Rags and bones he ought to sell.

'If yer can't feed yer babies givem Nestle's,' chanted the owner. 'If yer can't feed yer babies givem . . .'

'POLISH!' yelled the ironmonger opposite in his voice of brass, and

'Fresh every day,' cried his neighbour, selling fish, 'Sometimes *twice* a day!'

'Sometimes twice a YEAR!' thundered the ironmonger. Jacob nodded, laughter bubbling to his lips. A godsend to a market, a clown like that, he put everyone in a cheerful mood, and they needed it on a day like today, what a change in the weather; Jacob stamped his feet and flung his crossed arms repeatedly about his shoulders. Still, a hundred times better than too much heat, when bluebottles and worms feasted and grew fat in the gutters, and every cat in Stepney came to worship aloud at the fish-stall. To the devil with it, he'd said recently to Ada. Either one freezes there or melts away or gets soaked through, and if he were to suffocate from the stink the noise would bring him back to life quicker than a doctor. To which she'd replied in a sing-song that he chuckled to remember:

'And what would you *doo*-oo if God had for*got*ten to put a *Thurs*day into the week?' because they'd agreed it wasn't worth shlepping the barrow to market on the day most purses didn't have two coppers to rattle together.

'Yes lady?' He started untying the bundle of white pants. 'Any colour you like!' But the old lady shook her head. It was the fleecy drawers she was looking at.

'Treating meself today for a change, it's me birthday.' Her voice was surly.

'Twenty-five?'

'Come orfit!' but a smile broke through, she bated him down sixpence, and went off more cheerfully. Funny how one customer drew others alongside; he was busy the next two hours, and that's how he liked it, the heavier his pockets the lighter his heart. But when he was idle for twenty minutes on end he was convinced there wouldn't be another customer that day, that the crack in the cellar plaster at home would bring the wall down, and he at once saw the heap before his eyes; and last week's bad buy from the warehouse would surely drive him to bankruptcy, back he'd go to selling men's handkerchieves from a case on the pavement. And he started brooding on Miriam's refusing last Sunday

to go with them to Hyde Park, oh she'd given way in the end but where was the pleasure when he knew she'd rather have gone to the pictures with her friend than with them; already she didn't want them any more. And where was she now, if Charlie was eating his sandwiches it must be dinner-time, they'd surely forgotten him and why not, warm and comfortable by the kitchen fire while he stood all day without a spoonful hot food till his soul flew out of his body. A choleria. He spat into the gutter.

*Im*possible to drag the girl out of bed on Saturday and Sunday; at least two times she'd called her already, in between feeding Philip the last of his egg, hurrying out to serve, hurrying in to cook. Sixpence too much change she'd given the last customer, and caught herself too late, go chase her for it, and maybe made other mistakes, could it be otherwise when half her mind was on the child? In the middle of his breakfast when she was in the shop he'd slipped into the yard without coat or scarf to ride his scooter up and down, and on a day like this, and now where was he—nisht git iz meer—climbing again on the tree. She slammed the shop door shut, a fine thing to do on a Saturday, and rushed back, checking herself at the yard-door to open it quietly and wave to get his attention, and call him softly to come, and only then she shouted:

'How many times I said you should not? Look how black you are from the top to the bottom,' and she gave the bottom a good slap. 'And again your trousers torn, oi *vei*, rags I should dress you in, not clothes. Quick into the kitchen before you catch again a cold.'

She re-opened the shop, shouted up to Miriam from the foot of the stairs that it was already past ten, and washed the dirt off Philip's face and hands.

'No more climbing, you hear what I say? You can fall and break your hands and feet,' meaning arms and legs. 'The whole world envies me those trees,' she lamented to the ceiling, 'and I need them like a hole in the head.'

Philip looked downcast for a moment and then dropped flat on his front beside the sofa to pull out his cardboard boxes. Toys, those little tin things from Johnsons, were a pure waste of money, trodden underfoot the first five min-

utes. Big ones nobody in their senses would buy him, where could he play with them, where would they stand? Besides, there were all these boxes from the shop, as many as he wanted he could have, all shapes and sizes, and free. They were his cars and boats and trains, his houses and his furniture, and people he'd begun to cut out of them, and animals. He was never at a loss, the serious little boy, playing nicely when someone was in the room with him, and waiting till he was alone, naturally, before trying something he shouldn't. And here he was at her elbow in the shop, in the middle of serving.

'What you want out here?'

'Ha'penny for sweets.'

The little lobus, he'd discovered it wasn't easy to refuse him in front of customers. When only one was there she could explain.

'Believe me, it is not the ha'penny. Don't I squeeze two oranges for him every day, and give him to eat other fruits worth a dozen ha'pennies or more? No, the ha'penny I do not give because sweets take away his appe*tit*, such a bad eater he is.'

With a crowd there she usually gave in, thrusting the coin into his hand and saying Chocolate! with a stern forefinger, a ha'penny bought a small bar, healthier than a bagful of rubbishy sweets. But now she was cross with him, such a morning he'd given her already.

'Go inside!' she hissed, and went on serving while he stood there swinging one foot against a parcel and doggedly repeating at intervals:

'I wanner ha'penny, I wanner ha'penny,' till one of the old Church Road lot burst out:

'Gercher, mingy, give the poor little bugger 'is bleedin' ha'penny!'

Mrs Gilling, the cobbler's wife, opened her tattered purse and gave him a whole penny with her sweet smile, refusing absolutely to have it back and Ada went hot and cold, that poor woman with all those children, a penny was not nothing to her. Philip's eyes opened wide and his mouth closed hard and before she could make him put something on he'd flown to Johnson's, bringing back a large and poisonously green

toffee apple, goodbye to his dinner if he ate it all, and she'd be lucky if he didn't get diarrhoea into the bargain. In the kitchen she took it from him, he'd only had a few bites.

'Enough already, the rest after dinner,' and going to the bottom of the stairs, screamed 'MIRRI-UM!' in a voice that brought Miriam stumbling down the stairs fully dressed three minutes later.

'Aza dervaksen meidel,' said her mother hotly; such a grown-up girl, 'already in the fourteenth year, should be helping the mother, not lying in bed half the day while I tear myself to pieces. Gottenyu! Why am I so punished with a lazy daughter? You should be ashamed,' Miriam, that is. And the grown-up girl, just turned thirteen and small for her age, washed hastily at the sink, tore the comb through her thick and tangled hair and sat down to breakfast, ashamed, yes, but also confused and smarting with a sense of injustice, for hadn't she come immediately she knew her mother really meant it? The first few calls it seemed to her weren't supposed to be taken seriously, so what was all the fuss about. But she said nothing.

The trouble was she couldn't tear her eyes open in the morning after reading in bed secretly till midnight or later. This term they'd had to read for school exams the early chapters of *The Mill on the Floss* and *Jane Eyre*, which she was in the middle of now, but she couldn't stop at the end of the childhood parts any more than a hungry person with a slice of bread could stop after a bite or two unless someone snatched it away. She read as if starving, read while dressing, read at the table, read in the lavatory, and to finish a chapter would walk to school holding the book in one hand and leading Philip by the other.

'Put away the book,' the mother pleaded from time to time. 'Oi, enough already.'

The daughter would look up blankly. 'Why, what d'you want me to do?'

'I will show you to crochet.' But she didn't want to learn to crochet.

'Noo, press out these tea-towels and handkerchieves, give your eyes a little rest, they are ready to fall out.'

She'd get up mechanically to do the ironing or whatever

else Ada could think of to stop her reading, and take up her book again.

'No! Not for an hour! You'll drive yourself mad! Here, here's your own stockings to darn. I don't ask you to do mine. You want I should teach you the tablecloth stitch?'

'Oh all right.' The tablecloth or herring-bone stitch was beautiful, but once she'd mastered it, it was just as boring as plain basket-stitch. Ada saw her set her teeth to get through it. The girl was simply not interested in anything, it worried her to death. What would become of her, one couldn't clean a house with a book in one hand, or give it to one's husband instead of dinner. If she'd at least interest herself in the business. But not that either. One would think it had nothing to do with her. Weekdays she let her be, she had homework to do, but Saturdays she had to help, interested or not.

'Make already an end to the breakfast, it is nearly time for dinner. Go stand in the shop so I can do something here.'

She used to take a book out with her, and Ada let her till she saw the result.

'It is no good, Mirrie,' she said half laughing, 'when someone comes in, to stand with your finger on the place and say yes? as if you weren't here at all, or wished them far away! A customer must see a smile, must feel you want nothing better in the world than to sell them something, otherwise they go to another shop where they do not interfere with one who reads!'

She did wish them far away. They interfered with reading, they interfered with everything, and kneeling on a chair at the table in the evening with the most absorbing book she was well aware of the moment the shutters went up, the lights went out, and the parents came into the kitchen for supper. She breathed more freely then and used to shout hooray, till the time Ada nodded her head slowly, saying with her ironic half-smile:

'The shop is by you an enemy, yes? From what do you think we would live without it, from the air?'

Now she greeted customers civilly and expressed an interest in their wants, serving socks and handkerchieves, elastic and pins, for anything bigger she gladly called Mum! and Ada came out saying go make the beds or wash up or do this

and that. She never thought of looking herself to see what needed doing, she simply didn't notice, Mum said anyone might think you don't live here at all, or she said anyone could come and carry the whole house away with you inside it and you would not know from nothing. She did what she was told, and kept an eye on her brother, and went out when her mother came in, till it was time to have her dinner and muffle herself up to go and stand by the stall so that Dad could go home for his.

'At last. I thought you would never come.'

'It's only one o'clock, Dad!' She helped him tuck the sacking round the goods.

'To me it felt like three, at least. Now remember, don't try to sell anything but ask them to come back . . .'

'You'll be here by two sharp, I can sit on the box a few minutes at a time but I should keep getting up and walking round to the front and watching out that nobody pinches anything.'

He nodded, chuckling behind closed lips. 'Good, then I go.' She watched as he went off quickly with his lopsided walk, one shoulder and hip higher than the other, and turned to the stall with a sigh. Too cold to sit against the wall, leaning against the goods was warmer. Don't come she said silently to anyone who looked as if they might, don't don't don't; hating anyone to even ask the price of something, she felt so stupid not knowing, Dad didn't tell her so they shouldn't demand to be served, she was under-age, for one thing. Oh Lordy, Lordy, can't feel my finger-tips already, and pulled off her woollen gloves to rub them together, they were numb to the first knuckle, and next time she looked they were numb to the second, just suppose this yellowish whitish numbness crept right up her arms and right up her legs—she screamed faintly. Quick, think about something else.

'Can you tell me the time please?' she asked the chemist.

'Quarter past, ducks.'

She wished powerfully for it to be quarter past one tomorrow, having dinner all together at the table. Sunday the only day they could, though the door being still on the bell one or other might have to jump up to serve, which spoilt it;

but compared with other dinner-times the meal was peaceful, Mum telling little stories about the customers or Rivka Rochel's latest row with Yossel, not that she always listened, but the sound of her mother's voice running up and down the scale and her father's responses lower down, even Philly being told off for playing about instead of eating, were an assurance that everything was normal, a jumping-off ground for her mood to soar from, knowing that presently the shop-door would be really slammed shut, the beastly bell silenced, and they'd go up together for their Sunday nap, leaving her free, free, deliriously free for the whole of the rest of the day; she could read herself silly if she liked. Last night she'd had to leave Mr Rochester sobbing on his sofa because Jane wouldn't stay with him once she knew he was married, she'd cried a wet patch on her own pillow in sympathy, even now, thinking of it ... gosh, no hanky, she had to wipe her nose on her glove.

'Sorry, I don't know,' she told the girl asking about a blouse, 'my dad'll be back at two, you know the time now?' and the girl thought it was about half-past one.

Or if she could finish *Jane Eyre* tonight she could go with Katie to the pictures tomorrow, rotten luck missing the end of the serial last week through having to bounce a stupid ball about in Hyde Park with Dad and Philly, at least they wouldn't want to go there tomorrow, too damn cold. She pulled her gloves off and shook her hands loosely from the wrists, Dad always said chuck your arms round your back to get warm but it looked so foreign. She couldn't feel her feet at all and went stamping round the stall to get some life back into them, stopping between rounds so as not to look too silly, and remembering to hold herself straight. Mr Davis who coached them in drawing on Fridays said she carried herself well, it made her blush like anything to have something nice said like that, then he said don't stand with your hands on your hips like a washerwoman, which spoilt it, and once she nearly died when he told her that her neck was dirty, and swore to herself that never ever again ... She loved it when he put his hand on her head and she felt its warm heaviness, Friday was easily the best day of the week in winter, summer there was Tuesday for swimming, but

Saturday was always the worst day, horrible from beginning to end, would counting make the time go faster or slower, she got to a hundred and was too bored to go on. Surely it must be nearly time now, but I won't won't won't look towards the park gates, then it'll be a nice surprise when he comes, and it was; she jumped when he touched her arm from behind.

'Frozen? Run home then, gei gezinter-heit,' go in good health.

She ran all the way on feet that felt like someone else's and showed her dead fingers proudly to Mum, who swayed her head and screwed up her face and said ai-ai-ai-ai-*ai*! rubbing them between her warm ones and letting her stay in the kitchen, not calling her out unless there was a crowd, and once the painful pricking was over it was heaven right up against the fireguard on the straw mat that dug its pattern into her knees; oh just as good as coming home out of the glare in a heatwave to a jug of lemonade waiting on the table with bits of floating peel in it, all the doors wide open to create a draught, and the tap running in the sink; Mum said it cooled the atmosphere, splashing. Getting too hot made getting cool so nice, and getting too cold made getting warm so nice, but suppose I'd been warm all the time I wouldn't've noticed I was warm, would I, so if things are good all the time perhaps you don't really know—ouch, fire's too hot, and moving backwards on her knees she collided with Philip chalking a policeman on the brown paper with buttons down his middle and showed him there should be legs between the belly and the feet.

Then Mum came in to make tea, ah soft black bread with thick white butter and blackcurrant jam that was dark red and looked as lovely as it tasted, but as soon as she'd finished, blast, she had to take Dad's, Mum waiting till she had her coat and scarf and gloves on before pouring the tea boiling hot and the milk boiling hot into the enamel jug with the lid and wrapping it all round with the grey flannelette petticoat kept for the purpose. She hated carrying it like that, but was ashamed to tell Mum she was ashamed so pretended all the way down the High Street that there was nothing to be ashamed *of*, glad to be swallowed up by the churchyard

where there weren't many people about this weather, except those that couldn't see. If he was serving and the tea had to wait, he'd make a face when he got to it and drink only half, saying ess toig oif kapooress, meaning it was no damn good, but nobody was there now, he took it from her hands, drank it straight off and said:

'A thousand blessings on your head my precious daughter,' as if she'd brought him the elixir of life.

Oil flares were being lit here and there and she wished they had one, they made everyone look weird and exciting like Dante's *Inferno*, but Dad said it was a terrible danger for clothes, besides, the chemist had one and they could see by his. Now was the busiest time in the market, especially for those wanting something for nothing, see those shkootsim, Dad said, those Gentile boys, waiting in the shadows for a chance to grab? and every now and then a woman came pressing herself right up against the goods with a shopping bag wide open between her feet and he said in Yiddish:

'Go stand at the side and watch her hands, don't take your eyes away for a single little second,' and when there were no hands to watch there were things to fold and put away, fold and put away, without stopping hardly, it made her wild the way they came and rummaged and made a complete mess and went away without even a sorry, so that she was happy when he sold something and stuffed a crumpled note hastily into one pocket and gave change from the other saying good luck to you lady. Suddenly she cried out and pointed to a boy smaller than she was running off with a jersey he'd snatched in front of her nose, Dad started off after him but it was hopeless with the dark and the crowd and people waiting to be served, he came back with a jumping eyelid and one of them said ain't it a shame, grinning; they didn't care.

After that he said ich hob shoin genig, meaning he'd had enough. They pulled down the goods on show and she put them away in the right bundles while he climbed up and down to roll up the tarpaulin and take off the bars and pull out the props, and when they'd piled everything on top of the barrow he gripped the handles and set off very slowly while she marched in front crying, 'Mind your backs please!' and people moved away with satisfying promptness, they used to

take no notice when she first started doing it two years ago and Dad had said in his bubbly voice which meant he was laughing inside, how can they hear when you whisper to yourself. She'd taken a big gulp of courage and pretended it was quite normal for a little titch to march in front of a big barrow yelling mind your backs please at the top of her voice, and after a time she really didn't mind and kept on shouting till the crowd thinned out at the end of the market and she could drop back to walk alongside him the rest of the way.

First they had to get the tarpaulin off the barrow and lay it on the pavement under the shop-window, Dad too tired by then to do it himself, and she staggered under her end of it. Well at least nobody could snatch that up, and they chanced the apple box, too, though he'd planed it smooth for sitting on without getting splinters; the props and bars they laid down at the side of the shop floor and started unloading. Philly ran out to welcome them and was sent back for his coat and hopped about getting under their feet till Dad gave him small things to carry in too, and when Mum lent a hand in between customers they were all laughing, so funny crossing and re-crossing each other on the pavement and up and down the step to the shop, must look like some new kind of folk-dance, going out empty-handed, coming in full. Nice, doing something all together like that. They heaved the beastly tarpaulin back on the empty barrow with all the etceteras, and she dashed through to the yard and across Greenglass's next door to unbar the side doors and stand triumphant in the opening because she'd got there before Dad with the barrow. On his way to the house he went into the lav and she hung about with her legs crossed till he came out, and she sat down with a shudder of pleasure and sprang up in disgust, ugh, all wet! Why doesn't he look what he's damned well doing? She mopped up with the newspaper squares. You got plenty of light from the kitchen window if you held the door open with one foot, even sitting down she could manage it.

Hanging her coat up behind the curtains she saw *Jane Eyre* on the wide corner stair, and struggled, and lost, crouching down for just a tiny read, just one page, just one more.

'Miriam!'

She started up guiltily. Mum was holding the kitchen door open.

'What *is* with you, Mirry, the child is dropping and the fire nearly out, must I think of every little thing myself? Yes, Jacob, I'm coming.'

The coal pail was empty, blast it. Philip scrambled to his feet.

'Can I come and hold the candle?'

'Oh all right.' Sod Saturdays, sod everybody, sod everything.

'Hold the candle straight,' she said sharply, 'it's dripping all over the coal. Hold it high or I can't see a thing, high *and* straight, that's better.'

'You gonna wash me and put me to bed?'

'Yes, if Mum's too busy,' and he gave a little hop, meaning he was pleased. 'Careful! Now gimme the candle and wipe your feet on the mat, mustn't bring coaldust upstairs.'

The fire was far from out, why must she always exaggerate? Two shovelfuls were enough. She dragged the chair with the varnish off the seat to the fire, and banged the enamel bowl down on it. Mum tapping on the window with her wedding ring. What?

'Clean pyjamas, Mirry—warm them through on the fireguard, like ice they are from upstairs. And give a look to the soup it shouldn't burn.' And suddenly opened the door. 'I am sorry my child, to put so much on you, but what can I do, I can't leave Daddy by himself with a shopfull.'

'S'all right, Mum,' she muttered, and at once felt less resentful, raced up for the pyjamas, saw to the soup. Now, hot water in bowl, soap balanced on nail-brush just fits beside it, towel on back of chair, what else, yes, the sponge. She undressed Philip to the waist.

'Hands in,' she commanded. He did willingly whatever she told him. 'Look at the water, dirty already. Now which hand's yours, the black one or the white one?'

She put his pyjama jacket on before pulling off his other things and lowered the bowl to the floor.

'Hey, stop it! I've got to put my hands in that!'

'Can't help it,' he laughed ruefully, 'when I put my feet in the water!'

She held him up to wave goodnight to parents and customers, proud to show him off in his clean pyjamas, brushed, flushed, wide eyes glassily fending off sleep, aware of herself in the picture; the little mother.

In bed he said drowsily, 'Sing something.' One of these days he'd find her out. She couldn't sing in tune, no more than Mum could. Why wouldn't her throat produce the sounds in her head, where she heard them perfectly? She started the lullaby that made her think of a tiny Persian painting:

Amool is geven a mainseh, die mainseh is goornisht freilech ...

It was about a king and a queen and a vineyard; about a tree, a bird, a lost love. She swayed to its rhythm.

Loolinkeh mein feigeleh, Lulinkeh mein kind ... hush, my little bird, hush, my child ... Asleep, thank the Lord.

She tiptoed down, the song singing on in her head and in her movements as she poured the dirty water away, wiped the chair, made up the fire ... hello, twenty past nine and they're still out there. She opened the door. Her parents were standing still, looking blankly at each other across the counter.

'What's up?'

Ada wrung her hands. 'A whole big parcel wool-plated vests did not come back from the market. Not yet opened even, a dozen, and with long sleeves, noch. The last customer wanted one, and we start to look and look.' She flung out her arms. 'Jacob-el, I beg you, do not take it so to heart, we will earn it back again.'

His face was grey. 'What you mean,' he said hollowly, 'the whole day's profit thrown out, all the drudgery for nothing.' He sank on to a chair, trembling. 'If I had lain warm in bed all day we would be better off. Dinner-time it must have happened.' He turned to Miriam. 'Did someone come when I was away?'

'No, Dad!' she cried in fright. 'Well, yes, just a minute, a girl ...'

'No, yes, yes, no, you know what you are talking about?'

'Well I just remembered, a girl asked me the price of the blue sateen blouse hanging up, but she didn't come near the barrow even, just pointed, and I was watching all the time, Dad!'

'Heh. Perhaps. And perhaps not.'

'But Dad, she couldn't have pulled a big parcel out, she was too small.'

'And the sheigetz who took a jersey from under your nose, he was not too small?'

'Ai, Jacob, let be already, what difference when and how, gone is gone, the devil took it. Come,' she stroked his arm, 'staying out here in the cold will help nothing. Come,' she crooned, 'inside is a paradise, we have a marvellous soup, and in one-two we will all feel better. Come.'

Even soup is hard to swallow when there's a big parcel of wool-plated vests sticking in your throat, with long sleeves, too. Mum kept biting her upper lip, Dad got up to look again under the counter and she prayed that he'd find it but he didn't. She didn't have to be urged to go to bed, she cleared off as soon as the washing up was over, and picking up her book from the stairs she clutched it fiercely to her chest. When they came heavily up the stairs Mum switched off her light as usual and said goodnight. She waited as usual until it was quiet in their room and got up to switch it on again. She read and read till the book was finished, the church clock struck two when she laid it down and her eyelids were like lead, but all was well with Jane and Mr Rochester and the lump was gone from her throat.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Jewish Workers' Club in Whitechapel was a beacon for East European immigrants. Each new wave of the uprooted who found themselves washed ashore in so fargoyisht a land were soon drawn to where the mother tongue could be heard all round them, to become again part of something they'd broken away from, a kind of shtetl without the drawbacks; they could leave it, for instance, whenever they liked. But whether the new language and ways were mastered or not, whether they grew rich enough to move out to Clapton and beyond or grew old and worn out in the back streets of Whitechapel, nobody who'd once been a member of the Club could stay away for very long. Some, like Abram and Yenta Mitznik, who brought their only child with them, spent most of their free time there.

The big house opened to members every evening except Friday, and all day on Sunday. A couple of times a week the general public was admitted to a meeting, a lecture or debate, when tempers were easily lost by the politically sensitive audience, and sometimes by the platform as well. Not many chairmen could handle so explosive a people, or resist making the sparks fly themselves, and sometimes an incident ended in general uproar, and while there were those who enjoyed that part most of all, the Mitzniks walked out when the shouting began swamping the argument.

Poetry recitals and readings from the classics made more harmonious gatherings, and if a Yiddish Theatre actor couldn't get along there was plenty of local talent. Sholem Aleichem was the idolised favourite; anyone coming up the outside steps could hear the audience rocking. What a man. They came out in the interval wiping their eyes. He made the poor laugh at their poverty even in Japan, it was said.

And without the public streaming in it was still lively at the Club, for behind closed doors committees wrestled separately with Management and Finance and Catering and Culture, each of them sending a delegate to the Central Committee which co-ordinated everything and dealt also with Appeals for Help for urgent causes and other special topics, such as How to Draw the Women In, an historic theme seriously discussed, as it always is, by a man who'd left his wife clearing up the supper things and getting the children to bed. Elections to the Central Committee were fought as hard as Parliamentary ones, including the canvassing and heart-aches. In any committee room any topic could inspire political speeches from the left or the right that caused temperatures to rise and tables to be hammered on and personal quarrels that sometimes lasted through life. No such thing as a dull committee meeting in the Club.

Peace and quiet could be had in the library, a game of chess or a gossip in the bar, where one could sit for ever if one wished to over a glass of lemon tea and a piece of salt herring on a slice of bread. Old hands like the Mitzniks took a turn at washing up and serving their fellows, as much at home there as in their own flat, or more.

'What for should we sit miserable at home,' shrieked Yenta, 'when we can have pipples round us the whole time?'

Yenta's attacks on English were recognised by her friends as being more original than their own, the best being hoarded like gems to brighten a conversation with. Ada could send Rivka Rochel into convulsions just by quoting 'Cockenham Cock Road', and the years couldn't dim the glory of 'My cat got torn, the new one, the first day I hung him up', once it was understood that the luckless cat was only Yenta's singular for curtains. She was a buxom woman of average height who looked tall among the Samuels, her light brown hair piled high over a broad and pleasant face whose alert, rather tense grey eyes missed very little. She bossed and fussed and scolded her family and friends at the top of her voice and loved them to distraction; she told them so whenever the spirit moved her, whether others were present or not. She wore hats with veils and a lot of white powder, and insisted on kissing passionately everyone in sight, pursuing

Miriam into a corner if need be. Ada would remonstrate afterwards:

'It is not nice from you to run away when Auntie Yenta wants to kiss you.'

'It isn't nice of her to kiss me by force,' retorted Miriam, 'especially through a veil and powder!' not liking to add, and with such a big hard bosom pressing the breath out of my lungs. Yenta was firmly corseted to get into the close-fitting dresses she wore; she was very smart by the Samuels' standards. The whole family was.

'Do you not think it a wonder,' said Ada, 'how they manage to dress so good, even if he has got a workshop of his own? True, it costs them very cheap their furniture, and Yenta never stops knitting. Still, suits and coats and shoes one cannot knit or make from wood. Did you ever saw one of them to wear something old or shabby? Not even Abram, straight from the workshop.'

'By me is not at all a wonder,' said Rivka Rochel, sitting in her overall in the corner between table and sink. 'You forget perhaps that heat and light it costs them nothing, and the oilcloth on their floors will never in life wear out. They live at the Club, not at home.'

'Go go, Rivka Rochel, you exaggerate a little bit. I am only afraid they lay nothing aside for the future, they should not one day be sorry.'

'And if with Yossel everything is for the future and nothing for now, is *he* right? Me, I would rather do like them, if only I had the chanct,' meaning chance.

If she happened to be there when the Mitzniks appeared she ran straight home to have a good wash and change into her finery, coming back as if to a wedding, including the perfume and pearls. Ada, who stayed in her apron and was glad if it was a clean one, smiled inwardly. For Abram she adorns herself, and who can blame her, so sympatisch a man, such fine dark eyes and silken hair, such a mouth and nostrils, as if carved from bronze. What woman could behold him and remain unmoved, especially one with a Yossel at home. And so quiet in his ways, and so clean always, everything sparkles on him, from his shirt to his shoes. She had to nudge Rivka Rochel not to look at him so, in front of Yenta; both

of them knew very well what that wife suffered already, with every woman at the Club falling for her husband, and a rumour that he'd responded to one of them. There was an evening when nobody could get into the library, a group gathered outside it while someone went to the office for the key, and just as it was being fitted into the lock there was a wrench at the door and Abram walked out, saying calmly that it had jammed. Yenta took one look inside, saw that only Dora, the comely librarian, was there and fainted away on the spot. So the story went, it was Rivka Rochel herself who'd brought it to Ada, saying mischievously that one day she'd ask him the truth of the matter, and Ada said with anger, you should not dare! Since then Yenta hardly took her eyes off Abram and followed wherever he went. As far as anyone knew he never raised that low voice either to tell her off or to answer her back when she scolded. He seemed to be completely under her thumb.

'And I am asking you,' said Rivka Rochel, 'what sort of a man is he, to put up with such a yachna?'—a fishwife.

'Perhaps he wonders,' said Ada demurely, 'why you put up with such a Yossel?'

'You know quite well, it is easier for a man to leave a wife than the other way round.'

'Let me tell you, Rivka Rocheleh, it does not even fall into his head to leave her, in spite of everything he loves her very much.'

'How can you be so sure?'

'Sure I cannot be, but I think so. I feel it. Leave them better alone, and listen a bit less to idle-goers who have nothing better to do with their time than tell stories about each other. Do not dream about him, he is not for you.'

'Who dreams?' Rivka Rochel raised a shoulder in denial.

Annie was her father's daughter, from the clearly defined nostrils and lips to the slender, well knit figure; a gentle girl, at thirteen already a young lady with good manners who wore hats and gloves when Miriam, the same age, still had black under her finger-nails and ink on her clothes and had to be told to stop reading when guests came in, which she did with bad grace.

What with the Club, and the awkward journey from

Hackney, the family came only occasionally, and then by surprise. Both sides of the counter had sometimes to content themselves with bright smiles and nods till customers left and they could exclaim with delight and embrace and shake hands and ask each other how they were, and when Yenta had planted her violent kisses all round, Miriam was sent up to drape the coats reverently over a bed and bring down a fresh tablecloth, and the guests sat on the sofa to give Jacob room to extend the table.

Lily was just leaving when they came in one evening. Abram had met her some weeks before when he came to install the new wardrobe, but Yenta and Annie had to be introduced, and as the girl stood drooping by the kitchen door with her feet splayed out, chattering away in her friendly stammer, Yenta's mouth began twitching; the moment Lily left she burst out at Abram through peals of laughter,

'Oi-oi-oi! I am dying away! What for you do that to me?' giving him a little push, and he grinned naughtily as she explained:

'He told me, and with a straight face mind you, that this girl of yours is a beauty like only one in a thousand!'

Ada shook a finger. 'Shame on you, Abram, is it right to play tricks on one's wife—and I forbid you to laugh at our Lily! A great beauty she is not, but a good soul she has, like only one in a thousand. If only her work was as good. Noo, to the table, my friends.'

During a Mitznik visit Philip was sometimes found hiding, for how was he to know that Yenta meant it kindly when she suddenly shrilled at him, come sit by me, you lovely little boychikel you! or at Ada, when will you already sit still for a little minute-keleh? Jacob wished he could hide also. Whenever a soprano sang a false note he said she sounded exactly like Yenta, which wasn't quite fair. Yenta used a low, confidential voice nearly as often as the shrill one. As soon as tea was over he drew Abram into the shop for a chat about politics, Philip was allowed out to ride his scooter round the corner and the girls disappeared upstairs, leaving the women in the kitchen to cram the past six weeks into the next half-hour. Yenta said earnestly:

'For *why* you don't see to your hands, Adashee? They make you look a geborn scrubbing-woman.'

'Yenta, I have not so much time as you to look after them!'

After a visit from Yenta she soaked her hands at night and scrubbed them with pumice-stone and rubbed them with vaseline, but all for nothing, no sooner had she done the grate in the morning and made the fire they needed before Lily turned up, and scraped a beetroot or a carrot, and they were back to normal; handling money all day didn't help matters either. She didn't even care till she again saw Yenta's.

'Your hands are like silver,' she said in admiration and envy. They discussed whether to cut their hair or not, so many women had done it already. On the one hand ... but on the other hand ... They started off in English, slipping into Yiddish and out again and importing words from one to the other without noticing. Mothers' talk came onto the agenda. Whisper, whisper, which girl had started her periods yet and which had not, what you say to Rivka Rochel's Sarahleh, a misfortune, already at eleven, too young.

'Oi Adashee, I so love your Meerkeleh, what a picture she is, what eyes, what hairs! But she has never nothing to wear, nebich. Can't you affoderen yet to dress her a bit better?'

What Yenta called nothing to wear. That blouse and skirt Miriam had on, she'd made it herself, maybe not so perfect, but still....

'It is not the money, Yenta, it is the time I have not got. It is easier for me to make something myself than go out to get something specially. Not she, not I, are stock size, we cannot put on ready made and walk out. You know what it means, going for material, not seeing in one place the right thing, rushing ourselves not to leave Jacob too long alone in the shop. Sometimes we must go two times, or three. Then the next business, a tailor or dressmaker to find, fittings to go for. Last year she needed a new winter coat, by the time it was ready it was too warm to put on. The wardrobe your Abram made us is wearing the coat. I hope only that next winter it still fits her.'

'For why you did not told me?' yelled Yenta. 'I would go

with her, with mine whole heart! Perhaps now she needs anything?'

'It is very nice from you. But she must wear out what she has before we get new. I cannot throw away what is still good.'

Yenta knitted in silence, a corner of her mouth tucked in.

'You hold it so necessary, Yenta, for such a young girl to be so very good dressed?'

'Of course, no question! She feels herself quite different, going about between pipples knowing she has on herself something nice.'

'For your Annie, perhaps, she goes out so much. Where goes Miriam -sits always in the house, except to a school-friend or her cousins For them is good enough whatever she has on.'

'And here is the whole trobble!' shouted Yenta. 'How can you be satisfied to see her between the same four walls day and night? Not to speak of boys, it is of course still too early. But she will never meet nobody so long she sits behind the shop!'

'Yenta dear, let us speak more quietly, our men will think we are hitting each other!' She glanced through the little window, 'You will excuse me, yes, what I go to tell you? But I think Annie is too much in company and with older people mostly, and so late to bed nearly every night. You think it is good?'

'What you mean?' screamed Yenta, springing up. 'It is better than to be buried in a book not knowing nothing what goes on round her!'

It begins to look like a quarrel. We must stop it.

'You know what, Yentashee, I want a good hot cup of tea again, you will have with me, yes?' And clattered round with the kettle and the cups and the biscuit tin. A mistake to criticise what a mother does with her child, not everyone can bear it, but about Miriam she is right.

'Do not think, my friend, I am satisfied that Miriam is so much indoors. From time to time we try to get her out. If there is good weather we go all together to Hyde Park and play with the little one, or we go on top of a bus for a

ride somewhere. Sometimes Jacob takes her to the pictures in the evening. We do what we can do.'

'By me is all this not a soci*ale* life, not cultur*ale*. For why you don't bring her sometimes to the Club, she should see and hear something different, and you also,' she scolded, 'so intelligent as you are, not to be over your head always in cook pots and gescheft.'

'When can we go, tell me when? The shop shuts at eight, then comes supper and a child to put to bed, is already nine, a long walk to make, a bus or tram to take, we get there in time to turn round and go home. Sunday after dinner we must lie down and rest, we are not so young any more.'

'Who speaks about after dinner? After tea on Sunday is when you should come, the whole family, when you are ausgerested. More than one shopkeeper we have between the members and they would not let pass a Sunday evening, not to come to the Club.'

Ada sighed. 'How hard it is to explain you everything. Jacob has been there one or two times, at an occasion. He does not like it! He does not like too much people round him, too much noise. He says he has enough all day. Comes the evening he gives thanks to God he can be quiet.'

'Noo, let him be quiet gezinter-heit at home by himself. He will not run away if you leave the child with him, take Miriam and come farbrengen two-three hours.'

'What you are saying!' Ada laughed ironically. 'Leave Jacob to give Philipel to eat and wash and put to bed? He is not your Abram that can cook a dinner and wash out a shirt. If he undertakes to boil himself a drop of milk, or it burns or it boils over. And in any case, a whole evening by himself—no. He is too nervous, he would be too miserable. It must be as it is. You cannot compare your life with mine, Yenta. I am tied in two ways, with a shop and with a young child.'

'And with a difficult man,' said Yenta in her low voice, 'that makes three ways.'

And is your man so easy, Ada wanted to say, but didn't.

Yenta went on, 'Yes, a hard life you have, my friend. I have mitleid mit you. But I have an idea, what belongs only to Miriam. Lately the Club started a Yiddish school on

Sunday mornings, the children should not forget their own language. And they learn themselves a play with songs, I cannot tell you how nice, they will make a performance in the Yiddish Theatre in a few weeks. Our Annie takes a part. Oi Adashee, you must send Miriam to the school, on my life you must!'

Ada was silent. She needed Miriam on Sunday morning almost as badly as on Saturday. Was it wrong to expect help from a nearly grown girl? At her age she'd looked after three small children, not one, and cooked the dinner as well when her mother was busy in the grocery. And she hadn't had any education at all. Five days a week Miriam was learning. Wasn't that enough? But she said with a sigh that she wouldn't stand in the way.

But Miriam didn't want to go. Yenta boiled over. In her topmost notes she demanded:

'For why not? You would enjoy even yourself!'

Miriam wouldn't say why not, she wasn't sure herself. She didn't like making journeys alone, she wasn't interested in learning Yiddish again; the reasons came to her afterwards. Just now it was enough that Mum wasn't forcing her, so Auntie Yenta could scream her head off. But she'd like to see the play Annie was in. She loved Annie in spite of her grown-up clothes and ways. She liked the way her eyes closed up when she grinned, and because Annie had no devil in her like Sammy or Katie, it was she who had to think up something shocking to say or do. She had to take the lead, it made a change.

It was arranged that she'd stay with the Mitzniks the night before the performance, and Abram called to take her there.

'Noo,' he teased on the way, 'not wearing your plooshener mantel mit der plooshener potchovka?' She blushed, and he wouldn't look away, making her blush still harder. That tongue-twister of hers when she first came to England and proudly showed him her plush coat with the plush lining. He wouldn't let her forget it.

The Mitzniks had a proper dining room with a shiny sideboard curving outwards, a big shiny table in the middle and a few small ones here and there, and a three-piece sweet,

she'd heard it called, making it a bit of a squeeze to get round, but very smart; so was Annie's room. She had a wardrobe and dressing table of her own, lucky her, though you couldn't open any one thing without banging into another. On every flat surface in all the three rooms, and over the backs of the armchairs and settee, lay crotcheted silk doilies in pink or green or white, auftzuleben, Auntie Yenta said, to liven them up. She screamed a bit round the supper table because Annie spilled a drop of tea on her dress and again when she, Miriam, was undressing.

'For why you take down your stockings standing up—it is a chair there special for you—sit yourself away!'

Immediately they were in bed she asked Annie if she knew how babies got born, and Annie had a fit of the giggles.

'Oh, come on!'

At last Annie said shyly, 'Through your belly button.'

Miriam said promptly that was all wrong, she'd heard a grown-up say they came from down there. You know, the back part; like doing number two. It was Yossel she'd heard say so but in such a rude way that she couldn't repeat it, not even in the dark. Annie said surely it wasn't big enough to let a baby through, and Miriam said it was bigger than a belly button, you could see for yourself if you put your finger up there, whereupon they had a giggling fit together, and when that was over Miriam said she'd really meant if Annie knew how the babies got in there in the first place.

Annie said she'd often wondered.

'Well *I* know,' said Miriam. 'Someone told me at school. A woman has this red stuff, you know, and a man has some white stuff, and when you mix the two together a baby grows out of it.'

Annie raised herself on an elbow. 'How do you mix it together—you mean in a pudding basin?'

Miriam stuffed the pillow in her mouth and shook; then she gasped out, '*He* has to put *it* in *her*!'

Then each girl pushed the other, smothering their laughter until they lay moaning feebly. Suddenly Annie protested.

'No, it's impossible, you mean everybody, mothers and fathers, and the King and Queen? I don't believe it.'

They argued so long that in the morning they had to be shaken awake.

After breakfast Auntie Yenta said in her kind voice, 'Such wonderful hairs you have, dolleleh. I wish Annie had such nice ones. But why you let them stand up wild round your head? Make them wet, see, here are two slides to hold them down.'

She tried it, but not recognising herself in the neat result, ran her fingers through her hair to get it back to normal, and Auntie Yenta said she was an akshon, meaning obstinate.

She'd come in her navy gym tunic with a clean shirt blouse, but Auntie Yenta said that seeing it was so warm all of a sudden, would she like to borrow a dress from Annie, and when she saw it she said ooh yes. It was silvery lace over a white silk lining, and Yenta sat down and quickly let out the waist a bit and turned up the hem, meanwhile shouting instructions to husband and daughter about which tie to wear and which hat. When she put it on Auntie Yenta clasped her hands and said what a picture, and sent her to look in their bedroom mirror. It made her catch her breath to see that other Miriam glowing darkly above the silver. They wanted to lend her Annie's black patent shoes to go with it, but Annie's feet, like the rest of her, were like a fairy's. She had to go back to her own old lace-ups, which didn't look right. Yenta said consolingly,

'Don't you care, darlingel, nobody will look.'

From the moment the curtain rose Miriam forgot the shoes, the dress, and where she was in the world, and after the first five minutes she forgot to look out for Annie on the stage. *Children of Tomorrow*, it was called, a fantasy in song and verse about the struggle between the past and the future, with the past clearly identified as evil, the future as good. Not a blow was struck in the battle between the two sides, for what need of blows when the future could summon light and colour and flowers to its aid, as well as Father Time, while the past had only darkness, shadows and other nasty things. The play was divided into four scenes, the theme song coming into each of them:

Hey, from whence this outcry, who art thou over there?
We are children of tomorrow coming from the blacksmith,
Flying from the anvil all ablaze and spurting fire,
We have forged out a morrow free of care and sorrow!
Over fields and forests soaring, over roads and oceans calling:
Children of the morrow are we all!

In the last scene the shadows and spiders, shrouded by morning mists, lurked darkly in the foreground laying their evil plots, but far away, where the hilltops were touched by golden sunlight, the flowers and fairies were advancing. Heralded by trumpets, echoed by bells, they sang out their challenge once more, pouring invincibly forward as the sun flooded the valley until, in a final blaze of glory, the creatures of the ugly past were put to despairing flight by those of the radiant future.

'Author!' The audience was on its feet, clapping and stamping but Palme, the author, wouldn't present himself. An old young man with face and eyes of womanish softness, he stood at the back of the stalls smiling gravely as the audience streamed past him, his melodies on their lips.

After dinner Miriam was seen off with a parcel under her arm, and dreamed on long past the right stop. She walked back swiftly, not through the streets of shops and houses and ordinary people, but flying from the anvil with the radiant children of tomorrow. Ah, she too would be among them, forging out a morrow free of care and sorrow; she too would see the whole world bathed in golden sunlight. Ada, waiting at the shop-door to greet her daughter, saw the blind enchantment she was wrapped in. Noo, it was worth struggling alone through the morning.

'And what is that parcel you're holding?'

She took out the lace dress. They'd made her a present of it.

During the next months a great change came over Annie.

She grew stout and sluggish, her head got bigger and one eye turned sadly aside. There was a tumour on her brain which had to be operated on, and one Friday dinner-time when they were unloading the barrow someone came from the Mitzniks to tell them she was dead. Ada uttered a loud cry, covered her face with her hands and sat down on a chair in the shop. Jacob walked up and down cracking his fingers. 'A meeseh zach,' he muttered again and again, a bad thing. Miriam stood by the barrow, trying to understand. How could it be? The blue sky was still up there, the sun was still shining, people passed by as if nothing had happened. Annie! Her throat was on fire. She wanted to change into a new navy-blue blouse her mother had just finished, to show them all at school that she was in mourning, but Ada wouldn't let her. Hiccupping with sudden indigestion, she said:

'It is a better way of mourning ... to keep on the same dirty white blouse ... than to put on a dark one which is new.' Then she got up heavily to see to the dinner and Jacob went out to finish unloading.

When the Mitzniks came round again Miriam rushed forward to overwhelm them with kisses, but drew back, ashamed. They didn't look at her, they had no expression, they crawled like old people, shrunken, bent. Ada sensed, they wish not to see this living daughter. When she embraced them they broke down, all three.

Death is hard to accept, the death of one's child perhaps hardest of all. When they'd gone Ada told her family in Yiddish:

'In Starnochew was a very old woman, over eighty. There died by her a daughter of fifty. The mother tottered after the coffin, calling, Lord of the Universe, you made a mistake! Yet she lived three years more. Life also is strong.'

After a while Jacob cleared his throat and said he'd rather hear Yenta screaming again than the best singer in the world.

Abram, when a year had passed, wanted to give his wife another child, but she said she was too old, at forty, to begin again.

CHAPTER NINE

In his fourth year Philip fell ill. Up up up shot his temperature, and then his urine was red, like a woman who has her time, said Ada in awe, and ran for the doctor, who came daily the next few days. Such a nebichel to get inflammation of the kidneys, was it something she could have prevented? Several times a morning she slammed the shop-door to take up a drink or hot water bottle, arguing with Lily, no, no, she must go up herself, to see if there was anything to see. Jacob, down from his afternoon rest, said in a deep voice ess toig nisht, meaning it's no good, because what normally made Philipel laugh now brought barely a flicker to his lips. Miriam gave him the album with the red velvet covers to look at, and while she was out of the room for a minute he scribbled idly over sacred photos from the past, but nobody said a word. The pointed little chin grew sharper, larger and more mournful the eyes. What d'you expect, said the doctor, his burnished head nearly touching their ceiling, his voice and health filling the room. He'll catch up when he starts eating. But death had just brushed this family, and the first-born had died at four. Ada glimpsed Miriam on her knees one night, eyes closed and hands clasped together, and turned away with a faint smile. Noo, let her pray if it helps her, not that Jews prayed on their knees. Except Yom Kippur, she suddenly recalled, the men knelt in one prayer; and at once the Kol Nidrei music poured through her defences as if the chazan was there in the room.

They called in a specialist, who ordered Philip to hospital for observation; it was in Westminster, the other side of the world. Ada, feeling the lightness of her son's weight in the ambulance, fought down a rising panic. This was England,

not Poland; but one thing was worse here, she couldn't believe her ears, they wouldn't be allowed to visit him when he was awake, it would upset him, the sister said, and answered yes very firmly when Ada asked if she really and truly thought so. Perhaps they knew best. She went emptily out to lose her way home in strange buses, thinking of him waking in a strange bed to strange faces.

Every night she went with Jacob or Miriam to look at Philipel while he slept, to hear he was as well as expected and to leave a new little toy on the immaculate sheet. She begged the nurse to tell him who'd brought it, who knows if she did so or not. But he was getting on better and better, she could see it herself before they said so, and on the tenth night was told he could go home the next day. He was bright-eyed and eager when she came with his clothes, cheeks flushed and almost chatty, for him. Not till she dressed him did she find that his forehead was burning.

'Oh no, he's quite normal,' the nurse said frostily. 'We took his temperature just before dinner. He's been normal two days, otherwise we wouldn't be letting him out.'

'Please, *please* would you be so good, to take it once more?'

It was just over a hundred and one. She undressed the sad little boy, tried to comfort him, he must stay just a bit longer, and would have sat with him till he slept but tea was coming round, Mums weren't allowed, one might think a mother was poison. Outside she stood touching the hospital wall. So, such a mistake to make, and in England. That other one was also recovering when they killed him with wrong medicine. Helpless we are in their hands. She pushed her body homeward, against the direction it wanted to take.

When he was really better they recommended him to a convalescent home near the sea. A nurse was on the platform. She told the mothers she was there just to see the children off, no, she wasn't travelling with them. The five, all under six, were to be locked in a carriage in the care of the guard, a nurse from the Home would meet the train when they got there, it wouldn't take long, not much more than an hour, and no need to worry, she said to the clamour

that rose. It was all arranged. The guard would keep looking in.

Ah no, this I do not agree to, and making sure she'd enough money for a ticket, Ada announced that she'd go with the little ones. Jacob must manage without her even if it took her all day. The mothers, with jobs to hurry on to or a houseful of children at home, called blessings from Jesus and Mary down on her head, and offered help with her fare, which she refused, later wishing she'd thought of asking for their handkerchieves. It needed only the first to start crying when the train carried them away from the platform, and the rest joined in at the top of their lungs, except Philip who simply looked startled, sharing her lap with a bawling small girl. She tried to embrace the three others who clustered round them, gave each a turn on her knee, and blew all the running noses with one hanky and the tissue paper from a tangerine she'd brought for Philip; this, divided between them, won three seconds' quiet while they ate it.

They were met by a nurse, a small ambulance, and its driver, who got down the cases. No, she certainly couldn't come with them to the Home, there wouldn't be room, look at all this luggage.

'Then I will walk, if you will be so good to tell me the way. To be together with him in the same place half an hour, till he's used, it will do no harm to anyone?'

'Nonsense,' the girl said sharply. 'It's eight miles, you can't walk it, and even if you did, mothers aren't allowed in. You'd no business to be on the train. Either you leave him with me or take him home, make up your mind, we're late.'

What *is* with this country? A mother has no place here!

'He'll be all right,' the girl said more kindly. 'Once they get there and see the lovely big toys they soon forget everything, they do at this age. We've got our own milk and eggs, we grow our own vegetables, and they play on the beach all day long when the weather's like this. You can't hardly recognise them the end of the time. It's part of the treatment, you know. You wouldn't of taken him away from the hospital, would you, before he was better I mean?'

True. And what would he have at home in this heat? Lily could take him every day to that dusty churchyard, twice a

week they'd take him to Hyde Park, the rest of the time he'd be stuck in the kitchen, where they wouldn't dare open the doors for fear of draughts, after so bad an illness. The air was like wine here, she could smell the salt sea, he'd have children his own age to play with. She explained this to Philip and hugged him, and then she let him go; that is to say, she let the nurse pluck him out of her arms and heard his frantic Mummy! Mummy! Mummy! till the ambulance drove off, and went on hearing it for days.

He was supposed to be there four weeks, but he improved so rapidly, they said in letters, that they let him go back in three. She and Jacob went together to meet him at the station, he was sun-tanned and fatter, and he'd grown! But he wasn't pleased or excited to see them, he stiffened against their embraces, and it was the same when Miriam raced home from school and burst into the kitchen to hug her little brother.

'Why, what's up with him, Mummy? He pushed me away!'

'Leave him, let him be,' said Ada huskily into the sink. 'It must be the upsetting, coming home after so long a time. He'll get over it.'

But he didn't. Expelled from paradise once too often, he now chose to stay outside.

CHAPTER TEN

Early in May 1926 a woman stood silently in the middle of the shop, looking round. She hadn't come to buy, she said. She just wanted to know what was there. Once the General Strike was on they'd all be able to come and help themselves. Ada's colour ebbed away.

'So? I thought the strike was for helping the mine workers, not for robbing the shops.'

'You'll soon bleedenwell see,' the woman tossed over her shoulder.

She wasn't the only one to hint at revolution as the outcome, and even before the strike was declared they took to bolting the windows all over the house, as well as the doors; after it began any sudden noise startled them out of their sleep. Jacob would pull on his trousers, trembling, and go through the house and down to the cellars grasping a chair-leg, with Ada following closely, begging him not to be a hero. Then they heard that police and strikers were playing football together in Hyde Park, and breathed more easily. Revolution? In England? The last place in the world, thank God.

But leaflets were being given out by a fascist-type organisation, The Britons, they called themselves, blaming Jewish agitators for fomenting the strike. Once it was over the Jews were blamed for breaking it, Sir Herbert bleeden Samuels having helped to call it off.

'A broch oif zei beiden' said Jacob with an angry laugh; a plague on both their houses. 'Everything is our fault.'

There was other news to make them uneasy that month. Hundreds of Jews murdered in Roumania, an international anti-Semitic meeting planned for Denmark, and Pilsudski came to power in Poland. The Jewish community was so impoverished there, said a smaller news item, that in one

town the grave-diggers hadn't been paid and they'd gone on strike. Ada said,

'What have they got against the poor corpses, nebich?'

'The dead will squeeze money from the living.' said Jacob.

And Rachel wrote hush-hush from Warsaw that Ada's mother and sister were quite simply under-fed. Shoshanna had no work and wouldn't approach her brother. He had a family to provide for and was being pressed to pay his debts, though his clients were not paying him. She need not tell Ada how dearly she herself wished to help them, but the fact was, hairdressing had become a luxury ... and so on. The mother in particular was going downhill, with her various ailments she couldn't digest the cheapest foods.

Ada cried out sharply and wrung her hands.

'No no,' she wept, 'oh no, it is not to be borne. The ailing old mother going hungry while I fill myself with the nicest and best. At once we must send them some money, and send and send till the times are easier.'

Jacob was silent. Business had been bad since the General Strike.

Ada blew her nose. 'And to your sister we should also send again, not wait till she has to beg for it.'

'Can we support the whole world on our shoulders, at a time like this?'

She stretched her hands towards him, palms upturned. 'Let yourself imagine,' she implored, 'that the shop was broken into by the strikers. We might have lost twenty pounds, or fifty pounds, or even everything we worked for, no? Then let us send a thanksgiving to our families, that we may swallow down our own food with a better conscience.'

Unemployment was still rising. Weekdays it wasn't necessary to count the money in the drawer, one could see at a glance what lay there and they let it lie till Saturday night, when it was worth the counting. They had to start drawing on savings. Jacob went about cracking his fingers, Ada made doubly sure that not a scrap of food was thrown away, nor a sock full of holes, and a terrible fuss was made when Miriam left the light burning overnight in the kitchen. Passing the tailoring-and-repair shop on the opposite corner Ada noticed they were selling belts and ties that they'd never

stocked before, and at a lower price than theirs. What could she say, at least it had some connection with their trade. But when the sweets-and toys shop took in plimsolls and cheap socks she couldn't keep quiet. She bought a penny bar of chocolate, waited till the shop was empty, and pointed.

'You think that is right, Mr Johnson? It is taking the bread from our mouths. Would you like we should start to sell toys?'

He went on weighing sweets into little paper bags, and said politely:

'This is a free country, Mrs Samuels,' and she went out smarting. Aza hint! Such a dog!

They slashed their profits still further. When Ada let a little jersey, slightly shop-soiled, go at cost price, Jacob banged his fist on the counter. What was the point of working for nothing? She said better sell at any price than let it rot on the shelves, and besides, it was hard to turn away Mrs Gilling or any other hollow-cheeked mother who needed something for a child and hadn't enough money in the purse.

'But for the pub every night they've got money in the purse? and for cigarettes, and to lose on horses?'

In bad times there were more incidents in the shop than usual.

'Mum says you gimme change for two bob and it was two'n-six I give yer.'

Aha, shoin vidder de zelbeh meinseh, thought Jacob; again the same story. He recognised the twelve-year-old from Old Church Road.

'You bought a man's handkerchief about an hour ago?'

'S'right. Me Mum give me the money.'

'I called out two shillings when you handed it over.'

'Didn't,' said the boy. 'Half-crown. She says you owes us sixpence.'

'Go home and tell her she made a mistake.'

'I'm gonner stay here till you gimme that sixpence.' And he sat down hard on the chair.

Jacob shrugged. 'Stay as long as you want.'

Ada had been watching through the little window, and came out to say in Yiddish, 'Is it worth, such a business to

make over sixpence? Give him and let him go and break a leg.'

'So he will come back next week and do the same again, and not only him but the whole family and all the neighbours from Old Church Road.'

The boy jumped up, overturning the chair. He stuck his thumbs in his ears, waved his fingers about, and grimacing, uttered gibberish in mockery of the strange tongue. Then he gave the counter a hefty kick that cracked one of the cheap planks and rushed away.

'Noo noo,' said Ada grimly. 'You will have the gantseh mishpoochch here just the same.'—the whole family.

Within five minutes they marched in, the mother and father, shouting as they crossed the doorstep:

'You dirty little Christ-killers!' They towered above the white-faced Samuels and shook beefy fists across the counter. 'C'mon, hand us over our bleeden sixpence or we'll take it ourselves!'

Ada flung open the door to the kitchen. 'Mirry, go run for police!'

'Yah, that's it, go run for the sodden police, go on!' But they retreated, and stood outside with their son, yelling in,

'Dirty Yids, that's how they makes all their money, robbing the poor!'

A small crowd collected to join in the fun.

'We'll smash yer fucking winders for yer!'

'Go back where yer soddenwell come from!'

and other variations on a familiar theme till Miriam, who'd slipped out the back way, found a policeman to gasp out the story to and he came to move them on.

Sixpence. Both sides of the counter for different reasons considered it worth fighting for. Jacob called down the blackest of curses on the idiot who'd made the half-crown so like the florin. They tried leaving a two shilling piece just over the till so that they could point to it quietly if anyone came back and that didn't help them, one woman said they'd changed it for her half-crown as soon as her back was turned.

And if it wasn't that it was the silk stockings brought back with one of the pair filthy, laddered and stretched, with

strenuous denials that it had ever gone near a leg, that was exactly how it had been sold to them; and this though a notice now invited customers in large block letters to examine each stocking before leaving as they would not afterwards be changed. Jacob shouted that he'd banish stockings from the shop, but Ada wouldn't let him; it was the one thing still selling almost as well as before.

After any such incident Jacob staggered into the kitchen and sank down on the sofa with one of his knockout headaches, and they all had to tiptoe about and speak in whispers till, after an hour or two of cold compresses, he could stand on his feet again.

'No difference,' he said hollowly once. 'Poland, England, the same insults, the same hate.'

Ada said sharply, 'You speak like a child. *Is* there no difference? In Poland all your windows would be broken in pieces by now, and you'd be lucky to escape without a broken head. And what policeman would come to help you there? Help a Jew? He would laugh in your face! Here they just shout. Noo, let them shout, let them tear their throats to pieces gezinter-heit. You should not take it so to heart.'

But they all took it to heart, the whole family. To look at them who'd believe they'd been hit by nothing harder than words? Even the five-year-old sat with eyes twice as large as usual, till Ada took him by the hand and went for a walk to change the atmosphere.

Occasionally the doormat stank of urine in the morning, the shop door also, from the letterbox down. Jacob would seize the mat and fling it into the yard and shout,

'May he be ruptured, the yok who did it; a cripple should he become!'

One Saturday night, when the market takings had been added to the till, Ada opened it to give one customer change, and another at the counter said:

'Cor lumme, just look at all them blinking pound notes!' She had a wax-faced infant in her arms and three ragged toddlers at her skirt.

Ada pushed the drawer shut and said through stiff lips, 'You think it is all spending money? You think what we

sell here the warehouse gives us away for nothing? And high rent for a shop what is only a room, where is? And oilcloth what gets torn so quick on this floor, where is? And electric lights, such big ones day and night? These pound notes does not fly in here by themselves, let me tell you. I work very hard for them, twelve, fifteen hours a day sometimes, and mine husband also, and our girl when she is not at school, and not one from us knows what means a whole day to have for himself, every single day is a workday. How would you like it?'

'All right, all right, keep yer 'air on, missus! I was only sayin'.'

Ada swallowed, and finished serving her. You was only saying, and I also was only saying, and still more I would like to say that if you and your man made less children and poured less money away on beer and bets and cigarette-kelech, you could save up like we did from nothing, and get your own shop and labour like a pair of horses under harness and be envied for your few pounds. Only you at least would not be called a dirty Yid by those who come in here stinking to heaven and pee on the floor when they go

CHAPTER ELEVEN

It wasn't quite true that every single day was a workday. Twice a year the shutters stayed up and the door stayed closed all day. One of them was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, not that they wanted to atone for their sins, but all the other Jewish shops closed, and Jews passed by on their way to Stepney Green Synagogue, among them their handful of Jewish customers, each of whom, according to Jacob, was more nuisance than a dozen goyim, such fuss-pots, inzereh Yidlech, examining the quality and finish of a five-shilling article as if buying a house for five hundred pounds. He said for his part they could stay open instead of making a present of the day's takings to that mamzer in the High Street—that bastard—and Ada said it wasn't right to give offence by staying open on such a sacred day and he asked what was sacred about it and she said you know quite well what I mean. She so longed to hear Kol Nidrei sung again, and to share an experience with all Jews everywhere that she'd have gone to shool herself if it hadn't seemed hypocritical to go without believing in God or religion. But about the shop she had her way, and they enjoyed the Yomtov-like experience of breakfasting late all together without haste, and reading the paper without interruption, not from customers at least; for in their first years at Wildwood Place Mortcheh used to slip out of the synagogue for a quick snack, or even for a full dinner, and say as he left, with chin tucked in and the wide smile dimpling the wide flat cheeks, 'You will not tell Chaya or the sons?'

And one after the other the three sons who were old enough to pretend to fast would drop in famished for a bite, saying, 'You won't tell mother or the guv'nor?'

Chaya was the only one of them to stay in shool praying and fasting all day and she sometimes fainted from hunger

or maybe thirst, as not a drop of water passed her lips between sunset and sunset; and when Ada asked her why she kept Yom Kippur so strictly, seeing that apart from Rosh Hashono, the Jewish New Year, they served customers quietly at their side entrance on other holy days, not to mention the Sabbath, Chaya laughed silently but offered no explanation. Jacob said later,

'Need you ask? It is a clear thing, Yom Kippur she needs God's forgiveness for not closing on the other days.'

And Rivka Rochel, no more religious than they were, dropped in with Sarah to eat something, in case her landlady came upstairs and caught them at it, which Jacob said was nothing but an excuse to snatch a free meal, and though Ada didn't mind, he didn't like to see her jumping up and down on a day she could be resting; what is here, a restaurant?

They took to going out for the day, the weather in September being usually reasonable; by bus to Epping Forest where they exclaimed at the greenness and drank the pure air, and Jacob played ball with the children and Miriam ran fake races with Philip; or by train to the sea. To keep expenses down Miriam travelled on a child's ticket and Philip on none at all. It worried Jacob to break the law but Ada said reasonably that seeing the children were small for their ages why should they pay as if they were bigger. It was the other Law she felt more guilty of breaking; my mother should see me, travelling on Yom Kippur; is it any wonder that we all of us who come from home, meaning Poland, feel that this day is different and should be respected, remembering all the weeping and wailing that used to go on?

If only they didn't look so Jewish, so *foreign*, Mum with her nose and Dad with his walk, even from behind you could tell they weren't English, not that she minded till they were out next to other people, where it showed. She nearly died when they spoke Yiddish in public, though they kept their voices down, not like Uncle Mortcheh who boomed everywhere, she and Dad both pretended not to see him if they met in Mile End Road, and it was a calamity if he caught them on a bus; yet however quiet their voices people still turned round, sensing a foreign language, and if Mum spoke English it was worse, with her accent, Dad's wasn't at all

bad. What she minded about him was that he spat, taking care to wait till people passed and to aim for the gutter, but still. As soon as he started clearing his throat Mum would dig him with her elbow and say:

'Into the handkerchief, Jacob,' but he just shook his head without speaking because of what was in his mouth, and waited till a good spot turned up, or a good moment.

But all that fell away once they got to the sea, oh intoxicating, to taste the salt air and feel the clean sunlight on your skin. Mum said can you smell it Jacob? Take a strong breath in, and he nodded, smiling and shading his eyes against the glare, and Philly flung his arms out and started running, she had to catch him before he got to the sea, and with their shoes and socks ripped off they paddled, Mum calling careful all the time, till suddenly it was deeper and he shouted, she picked him up but he clutched her neck so tight that she had to take him back.

'I wanner spade,' he said.

'Is it worth,' said his mother, 'for just a few hours? Here, have an apple.'

'I don't wanner napple, I wanner spade.'

'Oh come on Mum,' said Miriam impatiently, 'they're only threepence.'

'Only! By you is threepence no money!' But she turned to Jacob.

'Jacob, take out threepence and give.'

'More rubbish? What for?' But he took out threepence and gave.

Then the child worked with silent passion to dig a trench from the sea to where they sat, and couldn't be enticed away by Jacob, who'd brought the ball, and Ada whispered, daddy's disappointed, look, and she got up from her book grinding her teeth. That blasted ball.

They'd brought a packed lunch, of course. It cost a fortune to eat in restaurants and what did they give you, rubbish they gave you, see this fried fish, how white it is inside, would you get it so good in a restaurant, never in life; Jacob, take a tomato or you will be too thirsty, and you too, Philipel, I will cut it in half for you; and for tea they bought fruit off a barrow, and ice-cream. Ada worked out the cost of the whole

outing and said they'd have spent just as much sitting at home, and Jacob laughing gently said he wished he was at home. He missed his rest, didn't like eating dry food all day and when sand got inside his shoes it drove him frantic. In spite of taking care they caught the sun and Ada prayed that no Yiddish customer would come in next day, it being written on their faces as clear as the mark of Cain what they'd been doing on the Day of Atonement.

Their other day off was Boxing Day, when they were usually too dead to do anything or go anywhere, for Christmas week the shop was open till ten or eleven each night, and on Christmas Eve itself till midnight or later, each little shopkeeper watching the others, unwilling to be the first to close; as for the market, oi vei, every day was a Saturday. A hectic excitement kept them going, caught partly from the people out on their buying spree and partly from the cash they left behind them. They had to clear the kitchen table every night to count it, piling the silver and copper into columns and smoothing out the crumpled notes, all of them excited to see such a harvest following the drought since the General Strike—Miriam, you should not tell to nobody, you hear, they will think us millionaires, when all in all it will only make up for the bad months what we had—and though they reeled into their beds every night that week, they rose re-charged to meet the next day's challenge. Even the poorest seemed to have a little money to jingle and were bent on spending every last penny. Jacob and Ada, who almost never gave presents except to someone getting married or born, and recognised each other's birthdays, when they remembered them, with a kiss and a greeting, and a bigger than usual packet of chocolate for the children, were staggered by a scale of present-giving that stretched not only to Grandpa and Gran and Uncle Bill and Auntie Flo, but to landladies, and tenants, and lodgers if they could manage it, and to neighbours either side of them, and with everyone giving to everyone else, people often came in together to choose their own gift, which seemed to the Samuels very funny.

Good-humoured and patient the crowd was on the whole, eight at a time or more in that small space, flushed with the joy of spending and giving, and with more beer inside them

than usual. Jacob said the shop stank like a pub at night, and Ada that she was drunk from smelling it all day, and each of them dodged, with as much tact as they could muster, too intimate a blast from a throat lurching across the counter; and occasionally someone was sick on the floor, which emptied the shop in a flash till they got rid of it; and from time to time came the automatic cry, 'Putting the pot on for Christmas, aincher?'

Oh plenty of shops round there did that, the sour-faced greengrocer, for instance, charged an extra farthing for her tangerines because she'd wrapped them in silver paper for Christmas, and Ada walked out on her in protest. She and Jacob wouldn't raise their prices, for one thing it wasn't right and for another it was bad for business. And then those idiotten accused them of it just the same. Miriam, planted strategically to one side as soon as she came from school, drew equal resentment from those who wouldn't dream of pinching and those who came for nothing else.

'Got your watch on, I see!'

Well, they had to have her there, with open shelves lining the walls and people pressed up against them, and even so things were missing, big enough sometimes to make a hole in the takings, or as small as the cricket belt a sheigetzl ran off with: and later returned, complaining that the buckle was broken. Jacob laughed out loud as he chased him from the shop.

Christmas Eve the frenzy was at its height, a very orgasm of spending that lasted all day. The Mitzniks came to help, Yenta soon after breakfast and Abram straight from work, and Rivka Rochel was in and out all day but never stayed long, there being no time for a gossip. None of them could serve more than elastic or safety-pins, nor was there room for all at once, but one at a time could give change or stand guard, Miriam being with Jacob in the market all day, and if anyone was idle for an instant Ada begged them breathlessly to please give a look to Philipel, nobody has time to say a word to the child, not that he seemed to mind, he went steadily and with absorption from one game to the next, taking more than usual care to keep things off the floor, with so many feet running in and running out. Now that he was

allowed scissors and paste at the table, life had opened out, he was making a paper basket you could hold by the handle. He no longer hid from Yenta's sudden cries of dolleleh, I love you! or don't cut off your fingers, my boychik. She'd been coming more often this year, he was used to her, and she didn't scream as loudly as before.

Yenta's chief function was producing the meals, for heaven and earth might open but a good dinner must appear on Ada's table, especially as guests were present and on such a day they must all keep their strength up. During every lull she burst into the kitchen to tell Yenta where the chopper was or to slice a carrot herself or give a few stirs to something in a basin, and in spite of the haste and tension they were happy, doing together what was usually done alone, and asked each other's advice on the cooking as eagerly as if neither could have managed without it to turn out a decent meal.

A splendid soup was bubbling on the fireplace in Ada's biggest saucepan. In it were pieces of beef and fowl to be served as the second course, and tiny dumplings made with eggs, and aromatic vegetables that scented the room, celery and dried mushrooms and what they called pietrushka, known in England as parsnip root, so that whoever came in raised their noses and closed their eyes, saying ess shmekt ess far-raist! in tribute to the fragrance, but unhappily Yenta left the saucepan handle sticking out and in hurrying past she overturned it. Into the fire went half the soup, raising clouds of dense and acrid smoke, and all over the shining black fireplace went the rest, and onto the straw mat, causing the cat to leap with a brief yowl into a corner where it sat licking the tip of its tail.

'Oi-oi-oi!' screamed Yenta, hands pressed to her cheeks, 'What I have done to you!'

It took Ada several moments to summon up the art to laugh it off.

'Do not worry, my friend..we will eat something else, nobody will go hungry, you will see. Look, these pieces of meat we can wash under the tap.'

But Yenta flung her coat on and hastened round the corner to buy expensive kosher sausages, two pounds of them if

you please, insisting on paying out of her own pocket. Whenever there was a minute they argued.

'By my life you will take the money!'

'By my life I will not!'

When Jacob trudged home sunken-eyed with Miriam and the barrow, Abram was there to help them unload, and Yenta stood in the kitchen urging tea and a nosh on everybody who had time to swallow, and Philipel, found sleeping on the sofa with bits of paper sticking to his hair and his clothes, was carried up still asleep in spite of a warm damp cloth having passed over his face and hands. Miriam was sent up to bed exhausted after supper and it was the Mitzniks, unused to such a pace and pressure, who stayed gallantly on their feet after the shutters had at last gone up, to help their friends reduce the unbelievable chaos, but not to count the money.

'Tomorrow is another day,' said Ada, airily dismissing what she and Jacob were dying to know. Men darf nisht bei yenem ois shtechen di oigen; one should not cause jealousy.

They stayed overnight, the women going up first to undress in modesty, crying out hysterically when the men pretended they were coming upstairs while they were still struggling with their corsets, then they switched off the light and got into the separated beds, insisting that the men undress in the dark. Jacob said one could easily make a serious mistake in those conditions, and when the laughter had subsided, and the strangeness of sharing a bedroom had worn off, they slept like the dead till seven the next morning, Jacob going down first with dangling braces to wash his head under the tap, for Christmas Day the shops round there stayed open till dinner-time.

But the frenzy was over. There was no market that day and the atmosphere in the shop was calm, compared with yesterday, more like the gentle exchange of kisses before lovers fall asleep; a time for small forgotten items and a gossip about what each customer had in the oven. It wasn't always goose or turkey, a big chicken was achievement enough, or a leg of pork, and old-age pensioners and others on their own counted themselves lucky to fry a chop as a treat. Children walked in stiff and careful in new shoes, being

promised a clout on the ear-'ole if they scuffed them right away, or with an old coat thrown open to show a gaudy new dress. Some had sore eyes and some sore skins, and nearly all had white faces with narrow jaws and hair that was scanty and dull, but little arms clasped big dolls or teddy-bears proudly, or wheeled doll's prams, scooters and bikes, and again and again it seemed that the poorer the child the more expensive the toy.

Sitting at dinner, Ada shook her head.

'What it only costs them, a doll or pram like that, ooh va va!—a fortune is given out this week, and next week, bread and jam for dinner, or a paperful of chips. Jacob, why do you sit and think? Eat, it gets cold.'

Abram said in his low, resonant voice, 'You do not understand these people, Ada. Let us say they did not put away their few shillings every week into Christmas Clubs, how much better would they live through the year? Like this they have at least one day when there is plenty to eat and to drink, something new to put on, a toy for every child. For months beforehand they dream of it, and afterwards they have something to remember. It makes them pleasure, it makes their poor, hard life more easy to bear.'

'Heh!' said Jacob. 'In a few weeks, if not a few minutes, the toys are broken in pieces. As for the parents, they drink themselves sick, they even die from over-eating, after every Christmas you read such cases in the paper. And that you call pleasure? Some pleasure!' The musical murmur broke through his closed lips and went rippling round the table.

'Maybe Abram is right, maybe that is the way to do, but I, I could not live like that.' Ada cleared the plates into the sink and served the compote, moving slowly now, no need to rush any more. 'Those few shillings they put into the Clubs, I would spend them on a bit more meat, a bit more milk, a piece fruit what they hardly ever see it; at least for the little ones. A bit of health I would buy them with those extra shillings, never mind the big doll or bicycle for Christmas. Yentashee, take more?—good, and Abram also. Yes, have, have, there is plenty, as you see.'

'Ada!' he exclaimed. 'How much meat, milk and fruit

would that extra money buy each week for four children, for eight, for ten?'

'They should not bring so many into such a bittereh ooremkeit'—such bitter poverty—'this is what makes them still more poor.'

Yenta said confidentially, 'They do not know how to prevent, the poor folk. So ignorant they are, you would not believe.'

'And if one tells them, do they listen? No, they say what are women for? But as they have got both the children and the poorness, they should see to get paid more for their work, not to put up with everything like dumb cattle without a word. No Yenta, sit, sit. You cannot get out from there.' And she passed round the glasses of lemon tea.

'You did not like it very much,' Jacob reminded her, 'when they made the General Strike.'

'True. I was afraid. Afraid they come straight in to take what we built up with so much toil. But to take away their own labour they have the right. Let the rich hang themselves less diamonten round the neck so the poor can put better food in the stomach. Philipel, still playing with the compote? Make open the mouth. One, two, again, the last one.'

'You are sure,' said Abram, 'that you have better health than them, with all your good food? Those labourers and dockers who come in here, they could rub you and Jacob away between one finger and thumb!' He laughed with eyes wide open, which gave him a wicked look. 'All on bread and jam!'

Yenta flared up. 'For why you talk like a yidiot?' He sat so still, he seemed not to breathe. 'Those are the strongest that you see here! The others, the hospitals are full with them, waiting on the benches, lying in the beds. You did not see enough of them last year? And where did you keep your eyes this morning when those poor kinderlech came in, looking like dug out from under the earth? Give only a look here to Meerkeleh and Philipel, what a difference, what colours they have, like rosen, what hairs, like silk! No question, good food makes good health.'

Ada rested her interlaced hands on the empty glass. 'My mother used to say no one can look into the stomach to see

what lies inside, but I say yes one can. One straight away sees is it full or empty, or has it good things inside or bad.'

Abram said quietly, 'Life is more than a full stomach, Ada.'

Looking up to protest, she met his full gaze, and felt a slight shock all over her skin, as when touching a burning saucepan by mistake.

'This you need not tell to me, Abram. One can be hungry for many different things.'

'How much will you bet with me that your customers would say it is you who does not know how to live? When you have money you put it away in the Post Office for later. When they have, they go straight out and spend it.'

She nodded slowly, arching her eyebrows. 'And a good thing for us they do so, or where would we be? Our whole living comes from them.'

He speaks of my customers but it is himself he means. He and Yenta are not so far from them, they also spend without thinking of tomorrow, still in debt over their heads, after fifteen months, for doctors and specialists, and for the burial; still borrowing from this one to pay back to that one, yet Yenta has again a new hat. When I borrowed for the same imglick, hungry and barefoot I went till every groschen was returned. Noo noo, farsheeden, farsheeden, zenen mentchen oif der velt, or how they say here, all sorts it takes to make a world, and the thoughts in her head and the voices round the table ran together till she dropped off and everyone jumped as the glass under her hands crashed into the saucer.

'Go up and lay yourself away an hour-two,' scolded Yenta. 'And Jacob, you also. I together with Abram will wash everything away, and Meerkeleh will show us where they stand. Noo, give yourselves a move already!'

They didn't want to, they didn't want to, but they went, Ada for forty minutes, Jacob for three hours, and the Mitzniks left after tea with kisses and hugs and gifts of warm underwear, accepted under protest.

'We do not want to be paid for what we did!'

'What you did, my friends, cannot be paid for!'

And now they counted the money from both days, and straightened everything up and made lists of goods needed

from the warehouse, before setting off for the year's biggest business conference with Mortcheh and Chaya, and the delicate comparison of takings for the week.

Boxing Day they stayed in bed till eight or nine o'clock, the husband going to the wife's bed for a morning embrace, and they lay laughing softly at so rare a luxury till she said careful, the children will hear, and he went down and made her a cup of tea, which he brought up with a biscuit but forgot the sugar, and she drank it without telling him. But from the middle of the morning the shop-door was being hammered on, and though he said at first in drerd mit zei, in the end he couldn't stand it, and a procession began of goods to be changed, the colour of this was wrong or the size of that, or it wasn't a shirt but a pullover me Dad wanted, and for the same money if you please, with the pins taken out of it and refolded any old how, and Jacob came in furious.

'Pshakrev! For this we lose our rest? A second Yom Kippur we have today –only today we atone for *their* sins!'

'Shah, Jacob, do not be so nervous, we will eat up dinner early and go to the pictures, all of us, and then they can bang their heads on the door if they want.'

After that there were three more Bank Holidays to look forward to, when they closed after dinner as on Sundays, but no more Jewish holidays. Several years running they joined in Mortcheh's Seder nights, then Jacob started refusing, he didn't like all the praying, nor waiting so long for something to eat, and they celebrated Passover only in their heads, what can one do, business is business. Och und vei if it clashed with Easter, when trade was bound to be brisker than usual, for Ada, driven by an old compulsion, had to scour the house from bedrooms to cellar, at least let everything be clean for Pesach, and some things new, here a pair of curtains, there a cushion cover; and every few years the kitchen must be done up, it could have done with it every single year. In other houses down the street the landlord paid for decorations, but whenever the agent looked over theirs he murmured very nice, very clean, doesn't need doing, and allowed them not a penny towards their costs.

'Naroonim zenen meer,' she said to Jacob. 'What fools we are, we also should wait till the paper hangs in ribbons and

the paint creeps away from the bare wood.' But they couldn't.

When the coming of Lily took the rough work off her hands she instituted Seder nights on a non-religious model of her own, preparing the food according to tradition, but without prayers or candles. that she missed. Ah yes, she missed them, more and more as time went on, and why, she'd left religion behind and wasn't tempted to go back, a weight it had been on their lives, intolerant, repressive, absurd; not being allowed to tear paper on the Sabbath or light a fire, and worse—not allowed to eat a perfectly good fowl in those bad years because of a blemish or a mishap that the Laws wouldn't overlook. No, it was not religion she missed, but its vestments, its adornments, its sounds and its rhythms; they'd given life a colour and a content that nothing could replace. Noo noo, there's a price to pay for everything, nothing is for nothing in this world. And she strove to make what was left as nice as possible, and put her soul and her intelligence into the creation of delicious food, and when Lily left after tea she got Miriam's help, for once granted willingly, to prepare the room as a Seder night deserved. They emptied the sofa of its litter and banished the Walowka from the stairs and polished all five brass door-knobs that Lily hadn't got round to doing, and washed Philip and themselves and changed into their best.

When the newly-cleaned cutlery glittered on the brilliant white cloth that she'd made for her wedding nineteen years before and brought down only for extraordinary occasions, (it had a complicated drawn-thread pattern round the hem, who has patience for such a work now?) and when the matzos stood ready on the table with hard-boiled eggs in salt water, and the wine she herself had made, a hundred times better and purer, she said, than from a shop, and the kneidlech were ready for the next course, that she knew from tasting would swim away in the mouth; only then, as the highest honour they could do the Seder, they closed the cupboard door to hide the chipped and yellow sink, and opened the shop-door to admit Jacob, who'd been kept outside until then. He looked about him and said, his blue eyes alight:

'Buckingham Palace may go hide its head in shame!' and

he put his arm round his wife and kissed his son and daughter, and took the boy by the hand and said in a voice deepened and enriched by emotion, 'Look at the mother and sister, are they not beautiful above all others?'

The mother and sister turned aside blushing, and when he'd washed his hands at the sink and they'd closed the cupboard door again, Ada said into his ear that Philip had new trousers on, he should remark on them, so he did; and they gathered round the dazzling table, Ada begging them not to dirty the cloth straight away, let it be clean one more night at least. Jacob poured the wine and they wished each other L'chaim and he said, to tease her, it was nearly as good as the borsht she made each week; and he told the children the story of Moses and the Israelites, and of Pesach celebrations in the past, always in poverty and sometimes in fear, and how the whole family had starved themselves to put a good supper on the table.

Miriam said, 'Like the people round here do for Christmas,' and he didn't like it, what, how can you liken *them* to us? The good atmosphere was in danger and Ada quickly changed the subject.

The second Seder night fell on early-closing day that year, and Ada invited the Mitzniks to the meal, and Rivka Rochel, bringing Sarah, contrived to join them when it was over, and manoeuvred herself next to Abram on the sofa, ignoring Ada's discreet shaking of the head. Aha! Now she is happy, now she shines, squeezed next to him while he jests and she laughs and Yenta on his other side grows restless with anger. And she, Ada, not liking it either, she jokingly pulled Rivka Rochel up by the arms and asked her to sit on a chair by herself and sing to them, which she readily did. The whole family was proud of Rivka Rochel's voice, ai-ai-ai, a goldeneh shtimmeh, and if now and then she was out of tune, well, she wasn't a trained singer after all, and didn't behave like a prima donna, they could all join in and prompt her if she forgot the words. She sang the old Yiddish songs with real pleasure and feeling, her expressive face and eyebrows adding to their enjoyment. There was a song in praise of the Rebbe and a song poking fun at him, one that despaired of getting daughters married without a dowry and another of triumph

at getting the youngest off one's hands, and a tearful farewell to a soldier son and a gay one about making up after a quarrel, and after the singer had rested and refreshed herself, Miriam asked her for the lilting *In my Little Ship of Ivory* from Bar Kochba's musical play, and Abram for *You Plough and You Sow*:

Ah where is your table spread,
Ah where is your festive dress,
Ah where is your sharpened sword,
Say my folk, what are you destined for?

and Ada asked for her favourite, *Reisel*: A young man whistles up to his beloved's window till he hears her light feet coming down; she tells him off for whistling, her mother doesn't like it; he won't do it any more, he loves her, he loves her mother, and the old house she lives in and the cobblestones she treads on ... But though the words were all as light as Reisel's little feet on the stairs, the melody had something else to say. It told of grief and suffering, it told of longing for the unattainable, and Yenta's face began to quiver and Abram's to stiffen, it was too near their personal disaster, and Ada whispered to Rivka Rochel who broke off *Reisel* and started *Eli Melech*, a kind of Yiddish *Ole King Cole* which brightened everyone up, with the children, and presently the Mitzniks also, waving their hands and tapping their feet, and Jacob drummed on the table and hummed so musically, a pity he was too shy ever to sing aloud.

Ada looked about her. Here is my happiness, with family and friends and the songs that reach back to our roots and make us one with Jews everywhere. As beautiful as the prayers and the candles are our songs, and they don't make me feel a hypocrite, they make me whole again, they fill the empty place that aches. How pretty our Miriam looks tonight, as pretty as Sarah, she is wonderful in red, with her eyes like mine and her mass of dark curls, she should only not go grey as young as I did; and Philipel is forcing his eyes to stay open but I will leave him, he is so tsufreeden, so content, shifting himself nearer and nearer to Rivka Rochel, almost looking into her mouth, he is fond of her, and he is musical like Jacob, if only he was not so ... so ... she didn't

know what, as if he lived behind a glass wall, unreachable ... but perhaps only a bit more shy than Jacob, his father's son in this way also, and what a good thing I have that apple cake to give with the tea, they will lick their fingers. Jacob will not be pleased they stay so late, he will grumble later, but I don't care, I want them to stay, I want this to go on as long as only possible, I don't want it to come to an end.

CHAPTER TWELVE

School was another world. Nobody could call you a dirty Jew there because everyone there was a Jew. She had two friends and two enemies in her class. First in her heart was Katie of the dancing black eyes and flashing square teeth who shrugged and didn't care when told off, and had a brother and three sisters to cope with at home. She was quick to take offence and her laugh had only three notes in it, doh ray mee, doh ray mee, but the laughter, and whatever she said, came straight from the centre of her being. In summer they played marbles and gobs in the playground till their nails were shaped the wrong way round, or yo-yo till their heads nearly fell off, or whatever the craze was for at the moment, and after school one of them saw the other all the way home and half-way back, unable to tear themselves apart.

Hilda was a newer friend; she wasn't so attached to her but she was OK. She had straight fair hair that fell and curtained one eye and Scenic told her she'd lose the sight of it if she wasn't careful. Hardly a day that one of them didn't pass a note across to the other saying, 'Ain't it good to be alive?'

They sent it when anything rotten happened, like getting your knuckles rapped by Scenic for a small crime or getting shaken by the Head for a big one. I shall give you a shaking to remember, she always said in advance, glaring; and it made your teeth rattle when she did it. She'd abolished the cane when she came to the school because she didn't believe in Corporal Punishment. Why she and Hilda sent each other that note was because they'd taken a secret vow: the worse you were hurt the gayer you must appear, and the note was in case you forgot.

Enemy number one was tall thin Fanny with the thin cruel

face who once chased her so closely all the way home that she was sobbing for breath and for fear when she got there and Mum wanted to complain to the school and was talked out of it only with difficulty; she couldn't understand about tell-tale-tit. Fanny had no mother and was supposed to be very poor, not that that was any excuse. And the other enemy was fat Maisie with the turned-up nose who spent all her time sneering, her parents had a big tobacconist's right on the Mile End Road and Maisie wore real silk blouses to school.

Far above everyone else, remote as the stars, was a tight little clique of the biggest, the brightest, the most beautiful girls, who sat together and played together and walked round the playground with arms around each other's waists; they were also best at all the sports. She'd once made an advance to them in the most disguised way possible, but never again, for one of them turned to the others with raised eyebrows, saying, 'Did anyone hear a worm talking?'

And another looked straight through her, saying, 'No, but I noticed a funny smell somewhere,' sniff-sniff.

They were a brilliant inner circle to be gazed at from a distance, she could never hope to be admitted; yet she hoped.

What made up to her for that exclusion, and all the other rotten things at school, were Tuesdays that were swimming and Fridays that were art. Fridays she and Hetty went to the Boys' School upstairs, where Mr Davis coached them in his own class. Being a bit of an artist, he took the two best girls each year; best at art, that is. He had thinnish hair and deep grooves down his cheeks and a sort of stomping walk, and he had a fierce profile, like those on old coins in the British Museum. Sometimes he was fierce to her and Hetty when he criticised their drawing, but then he'd wink with both eyes to show he wasn't really angry. It was quite different from the art they had downstairs. He didn't just plonk a vase down in front of you and tell you to get on with it and mind you keep the paper clean and tidy. No, he talked about what you were drawing. Once the Head asked her to enlarge a lion from a small picture to a big enough size for the Open Day Programme, and she thought she'd done it rather well till he came and shook his head.

'You mustn't only draw the lion, you must think about him, why is he that shape, that size, that colour? Imagine him, the King of Beasts, prowling through the jungle, hear the earth-shaking roar that paralyses his prey, see him crouch as he gathers himself together and with one spring hurls his half-ton of flesh, bone and muscle on his victim, tearing it apart in an instant. Could he do that if he was a nice soft pussy-cat like you've drawn there? could he do it unless his muscles were springs steeled by a thousand battles? unless his tail was a mighty whip to lash himself to fury with?—ah, no you don't!' He stopped her tearing it up. 'Use it as a basis, your proportions are good, and never mind the dirty bits!' he shouted as she took out her rubber. 'They don't matter—just forget everything those silly old cows tell you downstairs!' Then he winked with both eyes and stomped away.

He got them to draw the boys in funny positions, he made one stand on his desk with a leg drawn up to his chest and said, 'Both in the male and the female the body ends in a vee,' which got a tremendous hush, nobody dared giggle with *him*, and she felt all stirred up both because of drawing that part and because of hearing it referred to casually as if it was nothing special, and after that she tried being casual about such things herself and looked down on people who giggled over them.

When he found out she read books he recommended authors she'd never heard of before; Jack London, John Galsworthy and Wells, and she swallowed up the first ones with their names on in the library and went back for more, not that she understood all they wrote by a long chalk, but she liked the characters because they weren't good all the time; and when Mr Davis asked what else, she said she liked the everydayish language, and when he asked what else they had in common she couldn't think, till he said all of them were angry about poverty and injustice and war and she said yes, and they make you feel angry too. He was pleased with her for that.

Actually those books belonged with one Mum had read in Yiddish when she was young and always talked about, an American Utopia by someone called Bellamy, *In a*

Hundred Years' Time, it was written when Mum was born, and see here, she said, nearly forty years has flown away since then, and not a sign of Utopia in America or anywhere, nebich; but it gave you an idea of arranging life differently and better. For instance, those who did the heaviest or dullest work got paid the most and had the shortest working hours, and vice versa, and another thing Mum liked that utopia for was that most of the furniture was built-in so there was nothing to collect dust all the time, and the whole family could eat at good cheap restaurants instead of each balleboosteleh, each little housewife she meant, cooking her own little pot, but of course that wouldn't suit Daddy, nothing would ever be soft enough or hot enough unless she made it herself.

It was the most interesting talk she'd had with her mother since the year before when she got her period for the first time.

'You know you can have a baby now,' she said, and Miriam said she knew. 'And you know you should not let boys touch you or kiss you because one thing brings to another,' and Miriam said she knew.

And then Mum said men were very bad, and Miriam knew she meant bad in *that* way, and wondered what she'd say to Sophie, one of that top clique of girls, she'd the bluest eyes and most perfect nose and the cleftest chin you ever saw. She was always hanging round the Boys' Entrance and running through the public garden with them, and went back after tea to let herself be caught screaming when they chased her, enraging any mothers who were about into shouting, 'Go home and mend the holes in your knickers!'

At school they said the reason Sophie's chest had got so fat and hair had grown under her arms and elsewhere so early was because she went about with boys so much, which Miriam accepted as scientific fact while wondering about the causal connection. She wanted to ask her mother then and there but couldn't when it came to the point.

'And another thing,' said Mum, 'you should not let those little towels lie about, not even clean ones, it is not nice for Daddy or Uncle Mortcheh when he comes in, or the cousins, the eldest would know for sure what they are for, and no

man should see such things in connection with you, it is a meeskeit, an ugliness.'

And she went on about not washing your hair when you had it, but to keep specially clean down there, nobody should ever smell anything from you like those paskudniaks who come in the shop.

Well all this talk made her notice boys more; there was a new one in Mr Davis's class with dark eyebrows absolutely level and straight and a serious grown-up kind of face, the rest looked like kids next to him. She was rash enough to say in Maisie's hearing that she fancied him and what did that fat pig go and do on Sports Day but tell him what she'd said. He'd looked across at her with interest and started coming over but she fled and hid herself for shame. And she started day-dreaming about Sammy, who still looked down his nose at her and made jokes with his elder brothers that she couldn't understand. He'd mutter in that expressionless way that he was sorry he'd been so beastly so long, and she saw them standing together in lovely surroundings under a tree with spreading branches that let the sun through to light a flaming halo round her hair, both of them taller and slimmer and older than they really were, knowing perfectly well at the same time that it was finished for ever between her and Sammy; she'd fallen too far behind him.

When Mr Davis asked her what she was going to do when she left school, she said get a job, get married, have half-a-dozen children like everyone else, and only said it to sound cynical but he took her seriously and said you don't need to have more than you want any more, she must find out when she was older, yet he went and wrote in her autograph album, 'Don't grow old, stay always as you are today,' and laid his hand heavily on her head, which always made her feel marvellous. The funny thing was that nobody else liked him, someone with a brother in his class said he was horrible to the boys and beat them, she refused to believe it because he was so nice to her, and also they said he'd married a Gentile, about the worst crime a Jew could commit, but she'd have gone on defending him if he'd married the devil incarnate, and Maisie sneered, 'Sure, Miriam Samuels has got to be different from everyone else!'

There was some truth in that, she having been the only one to speak to a girl Scenic ordered them all to send to Coventry for something; she couldn't bear to see her looking so sad. So she stood like a lemon, stumped for an answer, but Hilda said as quick as anything:

'Well anyway she's not different in a beastly way like some people I know,' and she poked out her tongue to show who it was she had in mind; good old Hilda, she'd never have thought of saying that herself, not in a billion years she wouldn't.

Last year they'd had a letter at home after she failed the Scholarship through slowness, offering her a free place in the Central School, reckoned to be half-way between the Elementary she was at and the High School she'd failed to get into; they taught French there and Chemistry and other rot like that and kept you till you were sixteen. She was so appalled at the idea of leaving her friends and everything, and so vehemently against changing that Mum had looked at Dad and said:

'Noo Jacob, what good is it if she does not want?'

And he said, 'Ess toig oif kapooress,' meaning no damn good at all, what a relief, she'd been afraid they'd make her, and Mum said with one of her heavy sighs:

'I only hope we do not make a big mistake, that she will not one day be sorry.'

It made her realise how much she loved the school if only it wasn't for those boring lessons, or if only all the lessons were drawing and English. On top of arithmetic, history and geography they had to do boring old Hebrew as well, which Mum and Dad were pleased about, and to learn about keeping a kosher kitchen and all that, which they weren't at all pleased about. In the corridor outside the Head's office was a quotation in fancy gold lettering from the Book of Proverbs, beginning with:

Who can find a virtuous woman?
For her price is far above rubies.

They had to learn it off by heart, in English, luckily, all that a good woman had to do so that her children would rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.

When she recited it at home Dad was so delighted that he kissed her, which wasn't usual, they weren't a kissing sort of family, and he said:

'That mother of yours sitting there, she is an eishess chayeel,' a virtuous woman that is, in Hebrew, and Mum at the table buried her face in her hands for shyness. Her favourite bit was the end, it gave you a singing feeling:

Give her of the fruit of her hands,
And let her own works praise her at the gates.

Bible stories were OK, she did well when she had to write about them, and once she won an Essay Competition on The Peace Ideal in Judaism and got her name in the *Jewish Chronicle*, Dad kept showing it to anyone who came in. She'd built it round references to peace in the Bible and Mr Davis said he could show her just as many to prove that the Bible Jews were a bloodthirsty lot. It was Hebrew itself she couldn't get into her head, practically none of them could come to that, and when they had an exam on it Scenic was afraid they'd all fail, and kept giving them little hints on the quiet, so they didn't. They all passed.

Why they called her Scenic was because of her nose, it was like the scenic railways in fairs. In class once she called out *Scenic!* for a dare, and Scenic said: seen it, seen what? She was hopeless at making anything interesting, certainly for Miriam who'd had her three years running, having got to the top class at eleven, and after the Scholarship there was nowhere else to go but down, which she was sometimes threatened with when her marks were worse than usual or when she was caught dreaming instead of paying attention, or playing one of her pranks like throwing a note on purpose to get caught. You could of heard a pin drop when Scenic opened it, because they all knew beforehand what it said in insultingly big black letters: CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT and Scenic went scarlet and walloped her knuckles with her ruler so that they swelled right up, and Hilda had to send the note reminding her that it was good to be alive, but it was worth it; anything to break the monotony between Tuesdays and Fridays.

Each Swimming Day she sprang out of bed full of hope, oh

please God let me do a few strokes this time. She often dreamed she was swimming, what a sensation, gliding swiftly through the water like a fish, and when she got there in reality she dropped like a stone, but kept on grimly trying every time. That fat Maisie was so good at it and so scornful of her for not being able to after two years, that just to show her she once jumped into the Deep End, nearly drowning both herself and Katie who'd swum to the rescue, she clutched her so tight.

It wasn't just the trying to swim that she looked forward to Tuesdays for, it was the whole thing, the gaiety before they set out that nothing, no telling off, no mishap could quench; the long march with Scenic at the head of the column and Barmy, near enough her real name, at the end, both of them intent on keeping the pressure of excitement down to a safe level and the pace to one that could be managed with dignity, and the girls intent on the opposite, rushing along to make themselves uncomfortably hot to enhance the pleasure of the plunge into cool water. The least thing on the way could send them into fits, the hat of one teacher, the walk of the other, a dog who waited on the same corner each week and accompanied them briskly when they turned up—they snatched at everything from which they could wring a contribution to the collective cup of happiness. The day someone noticed the dog had two circles in the fur below his tail, one on each buttock, and Hilda promptly named him Shmendrik Three Holes, the whole column fell about so helplessly that even Scenic smiled a bit and asked to be enlightened, whereupon the mere thought of repeating such words to a teacher killed them all over again.

After changing into swimming things they had to line up round the pool for inspection and anyone with dirt round their necks or ankles was sent to get washed before going in —what a disgrace. She took to going for a hot bath after tea the night before, her mother protesting what for? You're going into the water tomorrow!

Secretly she named Monday evening Swimming Eve, for after supper, as if specially sent to bless the occasion, a Salvation Army band struck up at the corner of Wildwood

Place. All the kids from round about flocked to join with verve in the singing:

Yes! Jesus loves me,
Yes! Jesus loves me,
Yes! Jesus loves me,
The Bible tells me so.

and other exhilarating hymns. At once she snatched an apple and rushed out to join them.

'What for you run out there every time,' her mother asked uneasily.

'S'all right Mum, I'm not gonna sing anything, I just wanner watch.'

'It is not for a Jewish child.'

But she went. She had to. It was the best part of Swimming Eve, the trumpets glittering, the drums and cymbals crashing, the fresh Cockney voices singing, and herself in a state of grace at the fringe of the crowd, bathed, fed, and so incredibly light-hearted it was a wonder she didn't float away into the blue sky with her apple.

And another thing she wouldn't change schools because of, that time she had a chance to, was the School Journeys to the sea or the country for ten days each May, marred only by Katie not being able to come with, her parents having five kids to keep off a measly little greengrocery. She and Katie went round the gutters one Sunday after the stalls had gone, raking through the rubbish in the hope of finding lost pound notes but no such luck, they parted with lumps in their throats and when she came back that first time Katie wouldn't speak to her all day long because she'd forgotten to send her a card.

School Journeys were like the boarding schools girls went to in the books she used to read when she was a kid. The only trouble she had was over table manners. The first teatime they sat down at the long table Scenic said in front of everybody but looking at nobody:

'As I was coming to sit down I saw a most peculiar sight, a teaspoon up-ended on a saucer.'

She hastily put the matter right. At home there was no such thing as table manners, or if so they were Yiddish or

Polish and altogether different, for example, at home you never asked anyone to pass you anything, you jolly well reached for it yourself, or if it was too far off you got up and went round for it, the idea being not to bother anyone and if you did, that was what you got told off for there. And another thing, you never waited for anyone to start before you did, you got on with it as soon as you had it or Mum would ask if you were waiting for the Messiah to come. Nor did you use a knife and fork necessarily, or not together; in fact Scenic ought to see Dad, he used a tablespoon to eat his meat with and if it didn't go straight through without an effort he left it and said it was too hard—the meat, that is. As for putting your knife and fork side by side when you finished, he thought that was hilarious when she told him at home, it made him throw back his head and laugh out loud.

Once she'd got the hang of all the manners she'd no more trouble with Scenic, who they reckoned was having an easy life, only twenty-something girls to look after and with Barmy there to help. Barmy was tall and thin with hair screwed back in a bun and a chest as flat as a board though she was twenty if a day. She never interfered with anything, being completely under Scenic's thumb it seemed. She had round, light eyes with a black spot in the middle and she blinked a lot, and they all liked her though they didn't respect her. The only subjects they had to work at apart from nature study, which was a must because of nature being all round them, were drawing and English; and it felt quite strange to be in Scenic's good books. Away from school she wasn't a bad old stick. For instance that time she'd said on the train that the scenery was very picture-skew, Scenic could of burst out laughing but she didn't, only her lips quivered before telling her the right pronunciation in a trembly voice. What they had to write about was visits to churches and docks and bridges and things, and to draw them if possible; some girls couldn't, not if you killed them, she found it hard enough herself. Churches for instance. Frontways or sideways wasn't interesting, too flat, but cornerways you had to use perspective, which she'd never done before. She'd hardly ever looked at a church properly before

let alone gone right in, and she wouldn't tell at home about the hush you got inside you so that everything grew still, and the soaring feeling the great pointed arches of cathedrals gave you.

It was sharing a bedroom with four or five others that made School Journeys most of all like boarding school. Each lot chose a different colour for their belongings, she'd nearly driven Mum crazy wanting everything in lavender for hers; they'd managed to find mauve slippers but they couldn't buy everything new and Mum dyed her pyjamas and towels with great success. They did all the things they'd read about in stories, making apple pie beds and talking after lights out and having midnight feasts, generously provided by Maisie; and some things they hadn't read about like making up their own lines about Scenic and Barmy to fit into old tunes, she couldn't ever hear *My Bonnie* after that without thinking,

And Scenic came in with a pillow
And gave me a bonk on my head.

And Hilda brought *The Sheikh* with and read it to them each night by torchlight, making them writhe and scream quietly at the hot bits. Some girls cried into their pillows the first nights away from home, which she thought was pretty childish, but she herself got worked up when she was the only one not getting a letter in reply to the arrived safely postcards they'd written on the train going there. She had to write to them giving them a diary of her feelings when the post came four days running with nothing for her, but leaving out that she'd cried in the lavatory, before Dad wrote they hadn't realised she expected a letter and they were all well, there was nothing to worry about, they were managing without her quite well. In fact it hadn't till that instant occurred to her to wonder how they were going to get through two Saturdays on their own. Mum wrote a Yiddish bit at the bottom, she was only to enjoy herself and come back in good health, and Philly drew a policeman with very short legs on the back, and after that she forgot all about them.

They walked a lot. Once they climbed the cliffs to Beachy Head, the wind so strong up there it snatched her exercise

book full of notes about its height above sea level and other boring information given out the day before, but it had some of her sketches in it also so she started to chase after it but Scenic's yell of NO! rooted her to the spot, she herself went after it and it kept escaping in playful little spurts, spunky of her to keep on really, considering her age, she'd never see thirty again, and where she finally caught it was near the edge where it said DANGER and they all cheered, she came back with a grin that made her nose touch her chin, just about. There was a mist when they got up to the top and it suddenly parted in one strip as if invisible hands were drawing curtains apart and they all let out a gasp to see the sea shimmering like a jewel in the sun and the ships like toys tossed about on the waves, that was what she put in her essay and got a Very Good for.

And also they walked round the Cuckmere Valley, they nearly died laughing at what Cuckmere meant in Yiddish, and when they started moaning about the distance and their feet it was amazing what a difference marching songs made. Sometimes they had sing-songs in the evenings, she liked the ones with something strange about them, or something wild or sad, like the lady forsaking her silken gown and goose-feather bed to sleep in a cold, open field with the gypsies and the minstrel boy tearing his harp's chords asunder rather than sound them in slavery, and if it hadn't been for the tune being so lively in *There is a Tavern in the Town* she could have cried over the last verse.

O dig my grave both wide and deep, wide and deep,
Put tombstones at my head and feet, head and feet,
And on my breast carve a turtle dove,
To signify I died of love, of love.

In spite of having made up her mind that special parts of the body were nothing special, it was still an effort to sing breast, some of the others' voices actually shook and none of them dared look at one another when they sang it because they all had them, or at Barmy, because she hadn't.

And there was the getting brown business that caused more rivalry than anything else practically, they'd fling themselves down whenever the sun peeked out, the dark

ones like her doing best of course; and finally the present-buying for your family, another thing she hadn't known you were supposed to do and Maisie and one or two others bought such large and dear things that she couldn't even feel jealous, they were too impossible to dream of. Packing up and going home sent them into a frenzy that drove the teachers mad and once in the train and on the way the two of them fell limply into a carriage by themselves with frozen eau-de-cologne on their foreheads, saying they could shout themselves hoarse for all they cared now.

Mum and Dad and Philly at Victoria looked like pale shadows from another world, she felt she'd been away a million years and talked all the way home on the bus without stopping and they were surprised, she usually didn't have much to say for herself. And it still took time, even after her third and last School Journey, to get used all over again to stuffy old Stepney, to being called out to the beastly old shop and the stinking old market, and to those Saturdays that blastedwell went on for ever. And at school she was once again in hot water, hardly ever getting her sums right, or kings and dates or rivers and industries, and in sewing she managed to get ink on something white and in cookery she burned the cabbage twice in one morning. She couldn't really blame the Head for saying that day the fourteen-plusses were called in to discuss their futures:

'What are we to do with you, Miriam Samuels, you're not much good at anything, are you?'

Dressmaking some of them were going in for, well she was certainly no good at that, and shop work she'd sooner die and factory work her parents wouldn't hear of, not that she wanted it anyway, and after more talks it was settled she'd go to a part-time school for commercial subjects, she didn't mind that, she had to do something, and it would surely be more interesting than Scenic's voice which she'd been hearing so long that she didn't hear it any more.

Yet when the time came to be delivered from those deadly lessons it meant also letting go of the friends who'd brightened them, and of Tuesdays and Fridays whose splendour had cast such a glory on the wasteland in between that when she stood with knocking knees to make her

leaving speech to assembly she blurted out that she was sorry to leave the best teacher in the best class in the best school in the world. And sincerely believed it too, for the time being.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Rivka Rochel burst through the shop and flung herself face down on the sofa, sobbing aloud. Ada, busy with a piece of crochet in front of the little window, waited gravely for the storm to spend itself.

'Noo, let us hear already what is it this time?' I suppose he found a shirt torn when he was in a hurry, or a sock with a hole too big to be ignored. How many times I told her not to give him such excuses for a quarrel? Or a neighbour lingered perhaps too long over a cup of tea and he caught them and made a big drama, why she feeds the whole world on his sweat and blood, never mind that he himself gives invitations with one side of his mouth while praying to God with the other side for a refusal. If he could only be certain they would refuse he would even invite people to have a supper.

'I can't stand it any more!' shrieked Rivka Rochel, pummelling the cushion, 'not for another day more will I stand it! I will take my Saraleh and go!'

'Narisher kop,' you silly thing. 'Where will you go, where?'

'Anywhere! Into the street, into the gutter, only to get away from that paskudniak!' She sat up and wiped her eyes. 'May he lie in the grave upside down!' Her speech came in spasms from the weeping. 'I asked him for money for a new mattress, the old one is full of rocks. He, from iron he must be, he feels nothing, but I, I get up broken in the morning. A new mattress, he says, am I millionaire? So I tell him don't smoke so many cigarette-kelech, then there will be money for more important things. So he flares up and says what about the dinners what I burn and have to throw away, may his tongue drop off for such a lie, only once or twice it happened in all the years, and what about the extra five

shillings he gave me only the other day, shoin fartachlevet? And then he starts rushing back through history,' she started laughing, 'the longer we live the longer the history. How I was brought up by half-a-dozen mothers, meaning the grandmother and the aunts, how they made use of me to wash their babies' napkins and how they still make use of me to this day, and when I ask him how, he says by singing at their barmitzvahs and their weddings for a little glass of wine and I am only too glad to kiss their behinds for it. And so on and so on, mixing up kasheh mit borsht, what a big flirt I was in the old days, hadn't I told him so myself, and even now I'm still too free with the men, and then he said ... he said ...' she broke down again, 'in front of Saraleh he said it, that he was never sure she was really his child ...'

Ada drew a sharp breath.

'... when everyone can see with half an eye that they are like two twins. A koorveh he called me, a prostitute, and that is why I run so often to the Yiddish Club. Often! Once a month if I go is a lot, or twice maybe, if something special is on.'

'Enough already. Enough crying for one day, you will make yourself ill, one cannot see your eyes out any more. Go wash your face at the sink, I will make you a good cup of tea just as you like it, too hot to drink!'

'Wait, you think that is all? You haven't heard the worst. The end of it was that I said I wouldn't let him,' she dropped her voice, 'you know what, in bed. But ...' She shuddered and covered her eyes with her hand and wailed loudly. 'He forced me, he forced himself on me.'

'What did you expect,' said Ada drily, 'if you go to bed in one bed? You know him only since yesterday?'

'Where else should I sleep, on the floor? We have only that one bed.'

Ah yes, on the floor, on the floor, for me would be sweeter the floor. She put the kettle on.

'And so dirty he is, does not wash himself from one Friday night to the next, the same shirt and underwear he sweats in all day long over the press-iron, the same he goes to bed in at night, and his socks as well, too lazy to take off more than the trousers and the tie, I wonder he bothers

to unlace his boots. Like an animal he stinks, like an animal behaves. Oi, I should only live to be rid of him. Let Sarah only start earning and I will know what I have to do.'

Already she puts it off till Sarah starts to earn.

'You know quite well, Rivka Rochel, it will be two years before she earns something, and what will she get, ten shillings a week, fifteen? That will keep you both? Narishkeiten,' she said; foolishness, 'and you know it. Drink drink while it's hot, and take a kichel and listen to me. Listen well. More than once I talked over with Jacob that if ever you wanted to open a little shop we should lend the money. A sweet shop, or a button shop maybe, like that widow there, whose girl won a scholarship with two years back.'

'And didn't my Sarah win also, but that mamzer mine would not let her take it, saying a girl needs not to know French to wipe the baby's bottom with? And that he could not in any case afford to let her sit on his head so long in a high school earning nothing. He should only choke himself with the money lying buried in the bank, how well he could afford it.'

'Yes, it is a great pity, such a sharp brain as your Sarah has for learning. But what you say to my idea? With fifty pounds stock you could make a bit of a start, a little more for key-money. You could pay us back bit by bit, we would not hurry you.'

Rivka Rochel twisted her wet handkerchief round a finger.

'And rent where would I take from? A business takes time to work itself up.'

Ada hesitated. 'I am sure Jacob would not say no to lend also a few weeks' rent.'

'I should do it. Anything I should do only to be free from him,' she said violently. 'Oi, how good it would be to see him rotting away! Then he would know that with me he was licking honey.'

'And I will tell you something else. Between you and him would straighten itself out in time—yes yes, do not shake your head! Once he sees you ask nothing from him he would have more respect for you, a different person he would become. For a woman independent there is always more respect.'

'Yenta Mitznik is independent?' she burst out resentfully. 'What does she do all day, sits and polishes her fingernails. She has not even a child to mind any more, and screams her Abram in an earful, and still he has respect for her. With what is she better than me? I begrudge her the mazel she has with him,' the luck.

'What sort of comparison is that—Abram to *Yossel*? It is altogether another type.' Nor should she compare herself to Yenta. 'Respect from a Yossel you can get only through money, and you without a trade in your hand can get money only through a business.'

She was silent. 'You are right. I must think about it.'

Ada put down her crochet and looked sharply at her companion, who looked into her empty shopping bag.

'Ai-ai, Rivka Rocheleh,' she wagged a forefinger, and nodded slowly. 'I am very much afraid you will not think about it, and you will not do it.'

'What you mean?' She flushed dully. 'It was a very fine einfall,' a fine idea. 'I should live so long, how thankful I am to you and to Uncle Jacob for being ready to help me. It is a big thing from you.'

'Thankful here, thankful there, it is not the point. The point is, my dear, as you know quite well, that you would have to get up early in the morning, and have no time to snatch a little gossip, or go to the pictures twice a week or the Club even once a month, because at night, and even early closing days, one may be too tired, or too late, or too busy to go out. Yes, you want to be free from Yossel, but you do not want to make sacrifices for your freedom.'

'What freedom?' Rivka Rochel drew up her brows questioningly. 'You have freedom? With a shop?' She uttered a short laugh. 'You are a slave, chained by the foot! If you have been free to sit still and talk for half an hour, is thanks to the customers what did you a favour and didn't come in.'

Ada pressed her lips together and picked up her crochet. Yes, I am a slave to a shop, but she is a slave to a husband, and by me that is worse. To beg for every penny on one's knees and be insulted with ugly names and share a bed in hate. She arched her eyebrows.

'Everyone chooses his own fate. Do as you think is right.

But as you do not like to make yourself uncomfortable, you should not complain about the price of your comfort.'

'Comfort,' sighed Rivka Rochel, tidying her hair in the mirror, 'my enemies should know of such a comfort.'

So it was all for nothing, the hours she'd worked on Jacob before he reluctantly agreed. And what is more, next time they make peace between them, and peace they will certainly make even after this, she will blurt out everything to Yossel. Silly woman, she herself hands him in peace-time what to throw at her head in war-time. And by him it will mean only one thing, that her family tried to take his wife away, to exploit her for our own purposes, for doesn't he always believe the worst of everyone?

And when he slouched in the next day without a hello or how are you although it was three months since he last crossed their doorstep, her heart beat unpleasantly, thinking they'd already patched it up. Nevertheless she bade him welcome, cleared a place on the sofa and offered tea. Such a goodlooking man he used to be and see what has become of him, twisted is his face with bad temper and spite, his back more bent every time we see him. He took the tea and started ranting, but as usual it was against his wife. His dinner was never on time, and if it was, the meat or the potatoes were raw, rubbish she gave him to eat. No shirt had all its buttons and nothing was ever in its place when he wanted it, stuffed out of sight the devil knew where, it should look tidy for others was all she cared about, while behind every stick of furniture and in every corner dirt piled up and was left to moulder.

Look who talks of dirt. Dandruff lies solid as a yoke on his shoulders, the tie he must have dipped into a shmaltz-top, and his boots had forgotten the taste of polish, if ever they had known it.

'Ai, Yossel, Yossel, stop it already! Everyone has their own little faults, who is perfect, perhaps not even you yourself. But if you must make her a criticism, make it kindly, with kindness one can work wonders.'

'Kindness?' he said harshly. His lower lip hung loose and wet. 'Kindness, to her? With what has she deserved it? And

when is she at home to be kind to, does one ever see her sitting down to darn a sock like you? No, too busy she is day and night running round to make black my name everywhere.'

'And you, Yosseleh, what are you doing at this moment?'

With a loud sniff that dragged his nose and mouth sideways he thrust himself round, presenting Ada with his back.

'No, Yossel, you may hear me out, it will do you no harm to listen. After all, am I not your aunt, so to say, and to an aunt one should listen with respect, no?—never mind that we are nearly the same age. And at our age is time to be a little tolerant, not to pick quarrels like a young pair over every little thing. You have already a daughter growing up, it is not nice for her to see scenes between the parents every Monday and Thursday,' meaning every now and then.

'Uh-huh!' He turned. 'My devoted wife has already opened her big mouth here.'

'Who says? Nothing have I heard from her. Is it news that you have such scenes between you? You keep them a secret from the neighbours?' When there was a row he opened the windows to make sure the whole street heard.

'I ought to know beforehand that her family will take her side against me,' he said bitterly. 'How would Jacob like it, to come home every night to an empty house and find his supper flung on the table as for a dog?'

'Ach, Yossel. Every night?'

He started up. 'You call me a liar?' he shouted.

'Shah. Shtill zol zein,' here one does not shout. 'No, I think only that you exaggerate a little.'

'Several times a week, I swear by my life, she dresses herself up, no wonder she needs every minute a new coat, to show to those shnorrers at the Club who have not two ha'pennies in the bank how smart she looks, on the wages I race myself like the devil to earn for her. And climbs into bed not before twelve, making the springs screech out, when I must get up early in the morning.'

'Why not go to the Club with her? Those who go together come home together. You are a working man, a free person! Six o'clock you are finished and have nothing

more to do. Eat up supper, get washed, change your clothes and go. Why not? Live more mentshlich, take out a few shillings from the bank sometimes, and believe me, you will see how much better everything will get.'

He glared. 'Rich shopkeepers,' he spat out, 'stuffed full with goods from the cellar to the roof, can so easy talk of taking money from the bank! What they take out from their banks, workers like me who have only their bare hands bring them straight back again.' With a loud sniff he thrust his hands deep into his pockets and stalked out, shoulders hunched to the ears, eyes bulging.

Noo, I asked for it, and I got it. When will I learn to mind my own business? These people do not come for good advice, they come to hear an echo. He would like me to say Yossel, you are a good husband who is cursed with a bad wife. And she would like me to say just the opposite. And this I will not do, not for him, not for her. Perhaps half her troubles are of her own making. But she with all her faults is sympatish, likable, while he is a meeseh brieh, hesslich—an ugly creature, repulsive.

When Rivka Rochel next came in her eyes were dancing.

'A wonderful idea I had in the middle of the night. You will never guess what in a million years . . . I got up and took a pound out from his trousers!'

Azoi. Better a thief to be, than a shopkeeper.

'You mean to tell me your Yosseleh does not know how much money should be in his pocket?'

'Who says he doesn't know? He knows, of course he knows. But not a word did he say.' She paused. 'Noo, you are not going to ask me why?'

Ada had to smile. 'So tell me why already?'

'Because whenever I tell him I am short of money he accuses me that I lose it or let myself be robbed, otherwise it could not possibly melt away so quick. I guessed he would not want to admit he missed a pound in case I should say the same to him, and so it was! Searched and searched, where didn't he searched? Turned everything upside down and left me such a beshtand it took me hours to clear up. I even had the chootspa to ask him what he looked for, and he said what has it got to do with you?' She hugged herself.

'What is more, I will do the same again and again till there is enough to buy a mattress.'

'Oi Rivka Rocheleh, take care.'

'Was I born yesterday? A few weeks I will let pass before the next time, and then I will take only ten shillings. If ever he says something I will say to him what he says to me. Or I will say I noticed he was smoking more than usual that week!'

'And a new mattress, he knows they do not fly through the window?'

'Who speaks of new?' She raised a shoulder. 'A nice secondhand one it must be, and him I will tell that the neighbour gave it to me when she bought herself a new one. I can be sure he will not mention it to her, with her he is broigess, and with who *is* he on speaking terms? He will be only too pleased to get something for nothing to think of looking into the matter!'

She went off gaily to the market and brought back fish for them both, see how it spurts with blood yet! and yawned, and was given her second breakfast and chattered on till she jumped up with a scream of laughter to say oi! is that the time, he will kill me, and ran home to fling the dinner on.

Let her do as she understands. A sheineh reineh kapooreh oif em, serves him right. What one does not give willingly gets taken just the same. He does it, so why shouldn't she?

She dropped in for tea on her way back from Ben Hur's and told them about the marvellous picture she'd seen, and after supper there she was again till bed-time, a sure sign that it was still war to the knife at home.

'If we charged her rent for the sofa we'd be rich,' said Jacob, 'not to mention the tea and biscuits'

'Ach, Jacob, let be, it is not nice from you. And hang up the towel on its hook, soon you will ask me where I hid it.'

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The sofa—blessings on it—how could she ever have thought of replacing it with a sideboard? So many hundred-pound notes we should have, how many use it, apart from Rivka Rochel and ourselves. The Mitzniks once a fortnight now, Chaya and Mortcheh once a week together and more often separately—and their eldest son now and then, they didn't know that, and wouldn't like it if they did, because he came to borrow a pound and begged them not to tell on him. Yitzchok they'd named him but George he called himself now, what sort of name was that for a Yiddisher boy? He was half-way through college and already the next brother had followed him in, not a penny did it cost the parents, on the contrary, their scholarships helped to support them. Brilliant heads those children, every one, we have no such mazel, she sighed, but ... thou shalt not covet.

George was a short young man, blond like his mother, with her regular features. He was going with a girl and once in a while wanted to give her a good time, decent seats at the theatre, for instance, or supper at Lyons Corner House and a taxi to take her home in; his pocket-money didn't stretch that far.

Restaurants, taxis! Noo noo. Once they were married there'd be no more of that, let them enjoy themselves while they could.

'A nice girl at least, Yitzchok—excuse me, George?'

When he smiled he turned into Mortcheh. 'A real peach, but hasn't a bean, worse luck. Someone sent along a rich one but ...' with a grimace, 'a bit of a hump, poor thing, and no longer young.'

'Poor girl,' said Ada, 'What a misfortune, we shouldn't know of it.' And seeing him to the door, she raised a forefinger. 'See to it that your young lady does not get a hump too soon—I mean in front!'

Highly amused, he promised to be careful. In the holidays he coached boys whose parents were anxious to push them on a bit, and then he immediately repaid the pound; soon after the term started he came to borrow again. Once when he handed it back Jacob held it in his hand and said with his murmuring laugh:

'And how long are you lending it to me for this time?'

Sometimes the sofa was a bed for a night or two, not the lap of luxury of course, the head being almost upright, but guests not weighed down with money weren't fussy. One of these was the brother of Judah's wife, a Zionist on his way to Palestine, with a couple of days to wait before the boat sailed from Marseilles. What a guest, with personal greetings from home! and look Mirry, look Philipel, what beautiful chocolates your Uncle Judah sent us all the way from Warsaw, and in what a nice box, just the thing for your tie-pins and collar-studs, Jacob. He hadn't actually seen Ada's mother lately, but knew she was definitely on her feet, and Shoshanna was at Judah's quite often, an intelligent and charming young woman ... There was a but in the visitor's voice and Ada pressed him to speak frankly. A bit over-concerned with her health, he admitted, and Ada sighed, she knew. As for the little Reuben—her eyes closed involuntarily, for Judah had called his son after hers, the first one—he is so like your Philip here, another shy one—he pinched his cheek and Philip fled—he could be his brother. Parnooseh? A living? Well, they managed, was the best he could say, but life was not getting easier, a steady trickle of emigrants, as witness himself. If only they'd all come here, she said, and when the guest had gone she dreamed night after night that Judah and Eli and Shoshanna and she were children again at home with their mother in Starnochew, or that Judah had brought them all to live next door, and she was whole again; and waking, her longing grew sharp, almost physical.

A week later Jacob was washing his head under the tap and Ada was combing out her plaits from overnight when there was a light knock at the still closed shop-door.

'Men lozt nisht lebn,' he groped for the towel; they don't let us live.

'Be glad you have a customer! All right, I will go.'

But it was not a customer. She gave her head a little shake, and gasped, and flung her arms wide enough to embrace the world. It was Eli who stood there, a little smile at the corners of his lips, Eli, without a word of warning, over seven years since he'd waved goodbye with the others from that dimly-lit station in Warsaw. He'd come on the overnight boat. A holiday.

'Ooh va va!' cried Ada, palms pressed to her cheeks. 'Ooh va *va*!'

Jacob wrung his hand.

'Noo, brother-in-law, still cracking jokes?' asked Eli.

'Whenever possible!' Tst tst tst, what a memory.

Ada shouted from the foot of the stairs, 'Mirry! Eli is here, your Uncle Eli!' and suddenly was torn by indigestion hiccups and had to swallow a glassful of bicarb before she could speak normally again. Miriam flew down in her vest to hurl herself into Eli's arms; Philip stayed behind the stair curtains taking little peeps, like a squirrel behind a tree. The kitchen was alive with exclamations, questions and answers. No, he couldn't eat yet.

'That English Channel of yours, he is not very gast-freindlech!' he grinned faintly; not hospitable, that is; but accepted a cup of tea while Ada hurried excitedly round the corner to get fresh rolls for breakfast and something special for dinner, and took turns with Jacob to eat and serve customers, but hardly knowing what she was doing. Jacob was late for the market, the children for school, at the last minute Philip couldn't find his cap and everyone hunted for it, behind the cellar-door where it ought to be, on the walowka where it oughtn't, till Eli said:

'Is this it?' pulling it from under the indignant cat in its box, and Philip took it from him sheepishly.

'How many times did I told you to hang it up in its place?' and Ada brushed the hairs off rapidly. 'A good thing your Uncle Eli came specially from Belgium this morning to find it.' Miriam tore herself away, she had to see Philip to the old school before going on to her new one. The barrow was loaded, Jacob picked up the handles and pushed away from the kerb, and Ada was alone with her brother.

'Ach, breederl, breederl!' She touched him, smiling. The little brother was head and shoulders taller than she was, as thin and alert as ever, all straight lines and sharp angles, not an ounce of flesh on the fellow, and just as elegantly shabby; she recognised her mother's herring-bone darns on the worn and spotless shirt. 'A writer, and still so poor?'

'Where is it written that writers must be rich?'

When the Mute Will Speak had done very well, a second print was sold out and there was talk of translation into Polish and French, but alas, he'd sold all rights to the publisher for twenty pounds, not knowing any better at the time, and wouldn't get another penny not even if they translated it into Chinese, he said, laughter in the deep-set light eyes. He didn't care, it was over. He'd nearly completed another book and wouldn't be such a fool this time, in fact he'd already had a decent advance on it. When he was hard-up his circle of writers, artists and sculptors helped him, when he sold a short story or article he did the same for them. Sometimes he couldn't pay the rent of his furnished room and then he just walked out, leaving something of value as payment, a good suit-case had gone that way.

'Ober vee lang iz der sheer to live like a vagabond? You are twenty-seven, as old as the century. You do not think at all to settle down?'

He looked at her quizzically.

'All right, all right,' she said hastily. 'I did not say anything.'

He knew what all right was, but now and then had to ask the meaning of other English words that ran through her Yiddish, and she had to think a moment, finger on lips, what was the Yiddish for business, for customer?

He'd stay a month, if they could put him up for so long? What a question. They'd open a bed-chair in their room for Philipel and Eli would have his bed, a full-sized one—no no, oopgeheeten zol men zein, the sofa would break his back. When he was ready to eat she remembered his favourite breakfast, a jajecznica with onions.

'But how many eggs are here, Ada, a dozen? I am not used to so much food at once, and you must not feed me too well or it will be harder for me afterwards.'

She shook a forefinger. 'You make a mistake, Eli. Eat when you can and it will take you longer to feel hunger.' She sat by the little window, hands idle in her lap, content to watch him eating. She'd make up to him ten times over for having rapped his knuckles when he stole from the stew. 'And why should you go hungry when you have a good trade in your hands—our mother wore herself out that you should have it. Take on a little work from time to time, earn something to live on while writing, better than to starve, no?'

'But I do not starve, Ada. I can live on very little, and I am not interested to get more by selling my time to a boss. A writer needs freedom. He must wander about, observe everything, think. There is no other way if one is serious, not a dilettante.'

Freedom, freedom, everyone talks of freedom and everyone means something different. And everyone pays a different price for it.

'And if you should marry?—doesn't matter, Eli, if once in every hundred years one discusses such things with a sister!'

'Writers and artists should not marry,' he said lightly. 'If they do they exploit their wives, or neglect their work.'

'Or compromise,' she suggested.

'When I am old maybe it will be time to compromise.'

'Ach, Eli, who wants us when we are old?'

'So I must marry now as an insurance against old age?'

One of his eyes was slightly off-centre, adding to his look of alertness, as if he were taking in more than other people. He still had the same habits of taking an enthusiastic sip of saliva at the end of his sentences, and getting astride a chair when he was talking. After a day or two Philip was imitating him, following him about and hanging on his words. Eli had won him the first evening with the game that had sent Miriam into hysterics at the same age and still did, putting his hat and coat on back to front so that walking forward gave the illusion of walking backward, and vice versa. He built them a rough swing in the earthen part of the yard out of the way of the barrow, and when he tested it the seat collapsed under his adult weight.

'Again, Uncle Eli!' shouted Philip, clapping his hands. 'Do it again!'

Eli's swing they called it afterwards, in line with Abram's cupboard and Judah's box.

Once he took the children to the Tower of London, another time to the Zoo. When they came home he drew them rapid little sketches from memory while they watched open-mouthed; an enquiring giraffe, an elephant trumpeting, an upright gorilla sweeping the ground with his hands. Miriam never saw her uncle come to bed or get up. He sat half the night writing at the kitchen table, and was still asleep when she dressed in the morning.

'A fine way to carry on,' commented Jacob.

'What do you care?' said Ada. 'One less to wash at the sink when we fall over ourselves in the morning.'

He got up about eleven, and over his breakfast they talked about the war years and about their childhood, about the day he went proudly to the baths with new boots on after running barefoot for weeks, and came home through the snow, barefoot again, they'd been stolen. Now they could laugh. We didn't laugh then, she said, it was a disaster.

Sometimes he was still at home when the family assembled for dinner, and then Jacob questioned him about life in Belgium, how was it for the Yidn there, any anti-Semitism? and Eli said less than in Poland and more than was necessary. Usually he went out for the day. He called on journalist friends from Poland, he visited the offices of the Yiddish *Tseit*, he walked all round the East End back streets and through the heart of the city and its odd little corners, and naturally saw more of London in a few weeks than they had in all the years they'd been there. Once he went to the market with Jacob and just before the end of his stay they opened the *Tseit* to find a story over his name. It was about a ragged little Jew in the market who swore by everything holy that he'd been the King of Roumania's head gardener. He'd grown sun-flowers as tall as the Palace by throwing stale bread crumbs on the soil, a device unknown in Roumania till he introduced it. It had been very pleasant working for the King and they'd often enjoyed a glass of wine together, but he'd left in order to better himself. Now

he stood on the kerb between two stalls with a little basket at his feet, selling paper balls tied to a length of elastic which he made at home and sold at a ha'penny each, or three for a penny, confident that as a manufacturer without overhead expenses he'd make his fortune in a year, seeing that on a good day he sold twenty-five ... And so on.

'Eli,' said Ada that morning. 'You should have seen how Jacob enjoyed your story, he even let his egg get cold while he finished it. Yet your book about the deaf-mute he put down after only a page or two, and I myself almost gave it up at first. Why didn't you write it in ordinary language like this?' She tapped the paper.

He straddled his chair and folded his arms along the top.

'Every piece of work dictates its own form,' he said. 'One cannot write a full length book in the same way as a humorous piece for a newspaper. That is one thing,' and he took a little sip of saliva. 'The other is that the novel was experimental. Every generation must find its own voice, and so must every writer. And every furniture maker. One should not keep repeating what has been well done before. Not that I was the first to use that particular style, but I developed it. You found it hard only because you do not read modern literature.'

'I read no literature,' she said. 'How can I? You see how it is here.'

He glanced at her keenly.

'And, yes, now that we're on the subject, I have been meaning all the time to ask you something, why did your heroine say that shopkeepers sacrifice their children to their business?'

He slid off the chair and stood jingling the coins in his pocket.

'Noo, Eli?'

'This question I would rather not answer.'

'Then I shall imagine something terrible,' she said, smiling. 'Five years I waited to ask you this.'

'You must not make the mistake of thinking that a writer agrees with all his characters, or even with the chief ones.'

'But you agree with that girl?'

'Not with all her ideas, no.'

'Ai, Eli! let us not play with words. You have known a few shopkeepers in your time, our mother in the early days, if one can call that a shop, and Uncle Shloimeh; and I think you know one or two in London.' She arched her brows. 'You go to tell me that any of those people care more for their money than for their children—that they would not gladly give every penny away to save a child?'

'Life does not usually present us with such simple alternatives, Ada—your money or your child! In any case it was not money I had in mind, but that the demands of a small business are so great, and the small shopkeeper struggling to meet them is so overworked ...'

'Yes, go on?'

'That he has no time for his children,' he finished.

Her eyes were suddenly very dark.

'You think that washing and mending and shopping and cooking takes no time? You are a man, you do not know the time it takes. And the good food the shop brings the children, and the warm clothes, are they nothing? And furniture is nothing? And holidays? They are more than we ever had!'

'Ada, it is never useful to speak of today in terms of yesterday. For our parents it was an achievement to keep us alive and more or less well. Today we expect more. Yes, physically Miriam and Philip have more than we had, and what they have is important. But the soul also needs something.'

'They are getting an education,' she said intensely. 'Isn't that for the soul?'

'Of course—look here, Ada. Do not take this so seriously. You and Jacob do your best, no one can do more.'

'Except by not being a shopkeeper?'

He jingled the coins.

'Not he had a trade, nor I. Nor were we writers and artists, to live on our friends.'

'I am sorry I hurt you.'

'Doesn't matter.' She forced a smile. 'Sometimes one should listen even to what hurts.' And she broke into tears. He put a hand on her shoulder.

'Eli,' she wept, leaning against him. 'It is so hard to live like this, I am so sick of it, from morning till night, day after day ... and I also hoped for more. Not only for the

children. For myself. A book, a theatre, a social life. But Jacob ... nothing interests him. No...thing,' she drew out the word. 'Only rest, rest and more rest.'

'He has not much energy,' said Eli, and lifted her chin between his finger and thumb. 'Perhaps once in every hundred years you could go somewhere without him? With the Mitzniks, for instance?'

She shook her head and blew her nose hastily; a customer was rapping a coin on the counter.

He didn't want to be taken to the station. They said goodbye at the shop-door. Ada tucked two pound notes into his breast pocket. He demurred; she insisted.

'For you,' she said with that forefinger. 'For you alone, not for the gantsa chalastra!' Not for the whole gang.

They watched him striding down the street, the battered suit-case bulging with new shirts and socks and underwear. At the corner he turned, raised his hat and was gone.

'Will Uncle Eli come again one day?' asked Philip.

'Who knows?' said Ada.

His disembodied presence inhabited the room, at least for Ada and the children. For her he'd been a bridge connecting the past to the present, for them a meteor that flashed across their sky. Only Jacob was not displeased that the visit was over. Not that he had anything against his brother-in-law, not at all, quite a pleasant young man. though a bit of an idler. But he was glad to have his wife to himself again. And she knew it. And refrained from mentioning that argument with Eli, for fear of hardening his vague hostility to her brother, and it would upset him to no purpose. So it continued to rankle. Who gave more time to their children, did Mortcheh and Chaya? Probably less, one didn't see Mortcheh dragging himself to Hyde Park with the youngsters as Jacob did even when he was tired. Did Yossel and Rivka Rochel? Huh. And they were not shopkeepers. Yes, the Mitzniks had gone about a lot with their Annie, and she was not at all sure they hadn't overstrained the poor child. Let Eli have children himself, he'd see it was not so easy. Didn't parents also have a right to a little time to themselves? What can one do, one cannot tear oneself in pieces.

And she was ashamed to remember her outburst against Jacob. No, not even to a brother should one say such things, especially as it wasn't really true that nothing interested him. How he loved music, for instance. He didn't know who composed what any more than she did, and he thought the conductor's role a joke, the players knew their job, didn't they, what was the point of waving a little stick at their heads? All the same he made straight for the bandstand when they went to Hyde Park, and weeks later he was still humming the tunes.

Suddenly she felt guilty about having resisted a wireless set for so long. Miriam said they were the only house left on earth without one. Where will it stand, she'd said, where? Shall we throw the mirror off the mantelpiece or the crockery off the shelves? No, not on the table, every inch is needed all day and there's not enough light from the window as it is. Hanging over the sofa perhaps? But it would pull down the wall, such a thin and crooked one it was.

She said to Jacob next day, 'What about that strip there, between the window and the yard door?'

He banged it with his fist. 'Hmm ...' he said, 'hmm ...' It would do if he could get a set to fit that space; and he did.

Now he must make a shelf to support the wireless, and brackets to support the shelf.

'And while you are making,' she said, 'make another shelf underneath it, for book and papers and writing things, to get them off the mantelpiece and the stairs,' and then was sorry she'd thought of it. He had to put little side walls between the two shelves to prevent things falling out on his head, his chair being just below, and how upset he got when it didn't all fit together exactly. Upset? Heart-broken. He kept taking it apart and trying again, it wouldn't let him rest. Evening after evening where was Jacob? Down in the cellar, sawing, hammering, planing, anyone might think the man was building a house. And Philipel with him. Whenever the child saw the father opening the cellar door, there he was at his heels. Jacob was nervous at having him there with such dangerous operations going on, but Ada said, let him, let him, good that he interests himself, and that you do something together with your son. So Jacob gave him sand-

papering to do and he was happy for hours. Patience the boy has, like the father.

And after all it was quite a decent job, painted more or less the colour of the set that stood safe and splendid on top But when she came into the kitchen the first few times it seemed to reach out and hit her in the eyes. Gottenyu, such a *bombeh*! And it was hardly up before they began pushing things on to that lower shelf that had no business there, a cap, a dangling scarf, little boxes, another cause of arguments till she resigned herself to another messy corner.

The night the bombeh was installed there was no proper socket for the wireless, an electrician would be coming to make it, but now that everything was ready they couldn't wait, and stood about breathlessly, Philip hopping with excitement, as Jacob took the light bulb out of the middle of the ceiling and plugged the wireless in there, and it worked! —in time for a *Bedtime Story for the Little Ones*. They ate and cleared up and washed Philip in the light from the shop, but once he was in bed they switched the light off, listening in the dark to the news that Jacob wanted and Ada and Miriam didn't, and to a short play that they wanted and he didn't—what are they babbling about in there?—and after that there was a symphony concert. Miriam took a kettle of hot water down to the cellar and got washed and went to bed, and Ada was tempted to follow, a good chance to have a look at the paper. But she stayed on with Jacob, aware in the darkness of a quiet joy flowing from him.

When the concert was over he took her in his arms and said huskily that now he could hear such music he wanted nothing more in life, nothing at all.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

'Did you see this, Jacob?' Ada looked up from the *Tseit*. 'The Grodno Theatre Company comes to England for a season –to Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow, then here, to the Whitechapel Theatre!'

He paused in the middle of shaving. 'Zolen zei kimmen gezinter-heit.' Let them come in good health. 'What has it to do with us?'

'You don't remember my friend Freyda and her husband Aaron who acted together with me in the amateur group at home? You came to our performance once, before we were married.'

'Was there really a time when we were not married?' he murmured.

'Look better what you are doing with that dangerous razor or you will cut yourself again. Some actress, Freyda—no better than me. But Aaron, how talentful he was, both as actor and producer. Rachel wrote me when he formed his professional company—this is it, the Grodno. Naturally he had to take his wife in with him, what else? Noo, Jacob, we must go and see them.' Her eyes sparkled.

'And if not, will a policeman take us to prison? That gallery is a punishment. A thousand stairs to crawl up, a carpet of monkeynut shells when one gets there, and hard benches without backs. And squeezed in with strangers like sardines in a tin. For me is better the picture palace. One sees a face there, and hears music. And if the picture is no good one can go to sleep.' But he was smiling.

'What a poverty they lived in when I knew them, ai-ai-ai, and what disorder, and maybe you will make those whiskers a bit thinner, they are again quite swollen.'

She wrote to them at the Yiddish Theatre. A salon to receive guests in we have not yet got, Freyda, but how we

would rejoice if you have time to come with Aaron to our little room behind the shop, and snatch a little talk over a glass of tea as we used to in the past. But if you are too busy, never mind. We will have to be satisfied to see you on the stage; and showed the letter to Jacob, who said how he would rejoice if they gave their performance here in the kitchen; and she said maybe they are too grand now to come at all.

But they came, open-hearted, uttering melodious cries, he with a fur-collared overcoat, a Cossack hat to match, and a silver-topped stick for flourishing, she with feathers that nodded, earrings that jingled, and a big muff for storing snacks in, such as cooked wings of chicken. They swept into the kitchen with a strong smell of perfume, a gleam of gold teeth, and two free seats for the Thursday matinee, for the stalls, no less! And who would believe, Adashee, that you have such a big daughter already, what a beauty, next time we bring a ticket for her, and what a dear little boy, she patted his head and he retreated, and Miriam went up to drape their coats over a bed and to study herself in the mirror. A beauty? With that nose she'd suddenly sprouted?

They arranged themselves on the sofa, she square and majestic, transfixing each in turn with her slow and brilliant gaze; he slender and stooping, languidly brushing the straight black hair from his fine-drawn, long white face.

'And you, mein teierinka,' my dear one. He kissed Ada's hand. 'Perhaps you know who could put us up for three weeks, with cooking? otherwise the hotel will clean us out of any money that with God's help we will make.'

Rivka Rochel was sent for and came running, bringing Sarah, who Freyda declared had just the figure for an actress, and the girl's colour came and went in her transparent skin, the dark blue eyes widening with impossible dreams. Rivka Rochel fixed them up with a room at her neighbour's, a lucky stroke that brought forth a fresh fount of gossip. How they dressed and what they cooked and what they only said, those Grodno people, each actor in the company talked against the others; and who came to their room and who left at what time, their parties, their drinking, and best of all their

affairs, that she envied them for and deplored all in the same breath.

Ada prepared a light dinner that Thursday for eating earlier than usual, and while it was cooking stripped off her jumper and had a good wash at the sink.

'You are going to the doctor?' said Jacob.

'It would do you no harm to have a little wash also.'

'I washed this morning.'

'Then go up,' she said, 'and put on a clean collar and tie.' He wore only a scarf in the morning. 'And look at your boots!'

'What's wrong with my boots?'

'Is it nice to tease a wife by day and by night?'

He brushed them with spit, not believing in polish, washed his hands thoroughly, and went up and didn't come down.

'Jacob! I must put the dinner on the table!'

He came down in despair, he couldn't find der tshvok; his collar stud.

'Gazlan, retseiach, why don't you put it into Judah's box at night as I told you, then you would not lose time in searching next day?'

She found it; and please do not read over your dinner today, you must sacrifice one pleasure for the other, and he said I know which I would prefer to sacrifice.

'You've done your hair different,' said Miriam wonderingly. Jacob hadn't noticed that she'd combed away the parting.

'You don't like it?'

'Yes, it's nice, the Madame Pompadour style. You won't cut it, will you?'

'You want your mother should always be old-fashioned? Philipel, do not play about on the table, eat up.'

They were ready except for the shutters. Jacob, putting them up in a hurry, grazed his fingers, she had to find a bandage, and then she said he must wear a hat not a cap; he had to go up again, and after all this, he said on the bus, I suppose the play will be a shmatteh, rubbish. They were late, the curtain was up, and as they groped their way to their seats people near them hissed shah! shtill zol zein! Be quiet! and those further away said the same to the first

lot, but much louder, and so on in ever noisier repetition until the entire theatre was in uproar and it took several minutes before anyone could hear what was going on on the stage.

The play was based on Sholem Aleichem's *The Big Win*. The debt-ridden owner of a small workshop wins first prize in a national lottery, big enough to change his entire life style. He and his family, cut off from former friends and neighbours and besieged by a stream of unfortunates, grow bored with their unaccustomed idleness and the daughter runs away from home. Happily a swindler relieves them of the burden of wealth, the daughter returns, married to a former workmate, and they all gladly embrace again the old life with its problems. The simple drama was well produced, Aaron played the lottery winner with great charm and Freyda was not at all bad as his wife. The company won a standing ovation.

'And what do you say now, Jacob?' Ada nudged him as the curtain fell. 'Was it worth missing your rest for or not?'

He nodded deeply, unwilling to speak. That scene on the darkened stage when only the imploring hands reaching to Aaron could be seen, and all the voices cried Give! Give! Give! He drew down the corners of his mouth and swayed his head.

The following week there were tickets for Miriam and Sarah to see Peretz's fantasy, *At Night in the Old Market*, and at the beginning of the last week Freyda rustled in to place in Ada's hand two balcony seats for that evening, the first performance in Yiddish of a new German play, *The Headmaster*, specially translated for the Grodno Company.

'A thousand thanks, Freyda! You could not have picked a better night —our friends the Mitzniks have booked for this evening, and would you believe it, also in the balcony!'

She told Jacob as soon as he came from the market. He said hmmm, looking thoughtful and after dinner, stabbing his teeth with a toothpick, he said he didn't want to go.

'What?'

'Loi mit an aleph.' An emphatic no.

'Give me a reason?'

'We cannot get there for half-past eight, by the time

supper and everything else is finished, and I do not want to be hissed at, as last time.'

'Supper we will eat at seven for once, and at eight you will put up the shutters and go. If we do not have to look for a collar stud at the last minute, or bandage your fingers or run up for your hat, we can be there in time.'

'How can I eat supper at seven, when I have tea at five o'clock? I will not be hungry so early.'

'So, a simple solution—have tea at four without cream cracker biscuits, and I can promise you for certain that by seven you will be hungry enough to swallow an ox mit di kopetkess.' An ox with its hooves on.

'And where is my rest?'

'Ach, Jacob. Go straight upstairs now, go; do not sit there thinking, and you will still have an hour or more.'

'For me is an hour worse than nothing. By the time I am undressed it is time to get dressed again.'

'Then lie down on the sofa just as you are! I do not understand you, you so much enjoyed the other play, and the balcony is still better for you than the stalls, you will not have to strain your neck up. And kosten kost dich goornisht.' It does not even cost you anything.

'How do I know I will enjoy this play? Nobody has ever heard of it. And I will tell you the truth. I do not like the tararum, the rush to get ready, the eating in a hurry. It is not for me.'

She was silent. 'Then I will go by myself, if you do not mind.'

'Gei gezinter-heit.' He picked up his paper.

At five Jacob and the children were having tea at the table, Ada, washed and changed, by the little window, looking out.

'I have a good idea, Jacob,' she said brightly. 'What you say if I make you a geshmakkeh little sandwich to eat at seven, and I will even let you off cleaning your boots! Come, it is still time to change your mind.'

He laughed softly. 'There is still time for you to change yours.'

'Doo bist a groisser akshon,' she said; you are a very obstinate person. 'Enough that we waste one good ticket. It

is bad for them to have empty seats, a first night specially. So, Miriam, you will remember everything? Put down the book a minute. And the most important is to wait till Daddy is sitting at the table before you bring up the butter from the cellar, or he will say it shines, choleelo verchass.' God forbid. 'And Philip, no playing after supper, you hear?'

'Five minutes?'

'I know your five minutes. But what is with you, Mirry, such black rings under your eyes?'

She sent her mother a look.

'Then you should go to bed early with a hot water bottle and a hot drink.'

She stood serving in the shop till it was time to eat her sandwich and go.

'Noo Jacob, you wish me much pleasure?'

'Go, go, you will be late,' and a customer coming in just then, she went.

A fine thing, alone to go to the theatre, she didn't know herself, and felt uneasy. Jacob didn't like it; she usually did what he wanted. Arriving early, she sat looking out for the Mitzniks, and after a few moments caught sight of Abram. She stood up, and he came over in surprise to shake hands.

'What luck, you are also in the balcony! Where is Jacob?'

'He was too tired. And Yenta where is?'

He dropped his voice; a boil in an uncomfortable place, cannot sit, let alone walk.

'What a disappointment. Poor Yenta.'

'So I can sit next to you?'

'With pleasure.'

He helped her off with her coat and went for a programme, which Jacob would say was not necessary, tsu voos darf men doos?—What does one need it for? What a lot of people Abram knew, he had to keep nodding, club members, he explained, and more are in the gallery. Her spirits rose. At the theatre with a friend; it made her feel young again, and she noticed afresh how well-groomed he was, and how distinguished looking with the horn rimmed spectacles he'd taken to wearing, and that head of chestnut waves. She glanced quickly in her little mirror to tuck stray hairs away, and turning to Abram met his eyes full on hers and felt again

that same shock to her skin, as on Christmas Day at the table. She plunged into talk.

'You know what this reminds me, Abram? I was with my brother Judah once at home in Warsaw, the two of us alone. Winter, terribly cold, in the house nothing to eat, but a little money we had. So we argued, to buy coal for the stove or something for supper? And what did we do—we bought seats for the Opera instead!—in the gallery naturally, but it was warm and cheerful there, and as soon as it began we forgot we were hungry, at least till we got home. But the spectacle on the stage, and the music and the singing, for that it was worth missing supper.'

'But now there are some differences.' He smiled with wide open eyes, which gave him that mischievous look. 'You are not in the gallery, you are not hungry I think, and I am not your brother.'

'As good as a brother, Abram.'

'Still better, Ada,' and he took her hand. She took it away.

'And another difference,' she said. 'This time I have a husband waiting at home.'

So why had she told the silly story at all? Vexed, she found it hard to attend to the play, a modern one, and very strange, a headmaster making advances to a boy, she couldn't make sense of it, and was amazed and embarrassed when Abram explained in the interval. Noo, a good thing Jacob hadn't come after all, he'd certainly have said it was rubbish. There was only one more act and she saw it through in a haze, aware of Abram's arm along the back of her chair, of his nearness. She could ask him to move, or she could sit forward, but it would create an awkwardness and besides, and besides, she liked it. True, he had a weakness for women; but still. She stayed within the encircling arm. There was Aaron, inflamed with passion, cruel and magnificent as the headmaster, and Freyda dressed with quiet elegance, dignified and reserved as the mother of the boy. It ended tragically, the curtain fell to a storm of applause that brought the actors back, but by that time she'd pulled on her hat and picked up her coat and was saying excuse me to the people who stood clapping. Abram followed her closely saying voos loift eer, why the rush?

'Come and drink a lemon tea, Ada.' They stood by the doors. It was raining.

'Thank you, no, Jacob is alone. And Yenta not well.'

'Another fifteen minutes! Come.' He took her arm. 'For once you are not running in and out to customers, what a chance to talk a little.'

She wouldn't listen. He had to hasten with her to join the crowd at the bus stop, they were saying there'd been a terrible storm, never heard nothing like it. Jacob was afraid of storms. The bus was coming, she wished Yenta better, he sent his regards to Jacob, such a rush, she'd never have got on if he hadn't pushed her through; Jacob always waited for everyone else to get on before him, and turning to wave from the platform, she saw him raise his hat in the rain.

There was only one thing to do next time he came. Make as if nothing had happened. And what had happened? Nothing had happened.

She let herself in quietly and Jacob, standing by the fire cracking his fingers, started when she opened the kitchen door.

'You are here?' he said hollowly. His eyes were red-rimmed, his face was grey. 'I was thinking already of going to the police.'

'Such an old Londoner as you should know one cannot get a bus on the minute, this time of night.' She wrenched off her wet hat and coat. 'I will make your hot milk, yes?'

He faced her with screwed-up eyes. He was trembling. 'How could you let me stay so many hours alone?'

'Look at this, for one evening he cannot live without me! Another man would be happy that the wife leaves him in peace for a while.'

'And on such a night. I thought the roof was crashing down on my head.'

'Am I prophet,' she said laughingly, 'to know a storm will come on? And you were not alone. You had your daughter. And your wireless.'

'She went to bed early, before it started to thunder. I went up but both of them slept as if murdered, and as for the wireless,' his voice rose. 'I wanted to smash it with my two hands! Dance music they gave out, jazz rubbish.'

'And that is also my fault? Do not make a scene, Jacob, I beg of you. I must remind you that you yourself said I could go. And gezinter heit.' In good health.

'What else could I do, hold you back by force?'

'You make me for a criminal! What did I do, what, what? Once in a hundred years I go out without you, to see my friends on the stage. Is this a crime?'

'A Grodno Theatre is here so everything must go to the devil,' he shouted. 'No eating or drinking in time, no resting, a meeseh meshineh oif zei!' A curse on them.

'Shah, shah, you will make yourself one of those headaches.'

'A headache you say? If you only knew what a hammer is banging in here the whole evening. And what thoughts! I tell you, Ada, when I was by myself in the war-time, not knowing if you still lived or not, and when I knew you were coming back to me ...' His voice broke, and he cleared his throat. 'If someone had told me then that a time would come when you, my Ada ...' he choked, trembled violently and staggered, and she stepped forward in alarm, led him to the sofa, made him lie down. There were tears at the corners of his closed eyes, and he groaned that the cushion was a stone to his head. She ran up and brought down a pillow, turned off the light and made cold compresses by the light from the dying fire.

'Jacobel, oi Jacobel, what a state you have got yourself into over nothing. It hurts me to see you like this.'

He didn't answer, and she let him be. We will talk it over another time, when he is calmer. Yet what is there to talk about, everything has been said. I had a right to go. And I was wrong to go. Did not my heart tell me it was wrong? He is nervous and weak. I am the strong one. Yes, I could oppose him, I could insist to do as I want. And what would I gain if it made bitter our life together? The stronger must be the one to give way. I must never do this again. Never.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Two young men came into the shop, asking in Yiddish for Jacob Samuels. They wore high-necked Russian shirts, their shabby knickerbockers buttoned down over their knees, and though Jacob said Sholem Aleichem he was at first a little distant; what, more guests? One would think this was the only Jewish house in London for a foreigner to come to. They clicked their heels, placed a hand to their chests and stiffly bowed, introducing themselves: Chimon Englander and Yankel Levine from Prozhnie, his little town; his sister had given them his address. He'd known the parents of both to nod to, and was suddenly excited and moved. So his birth place was still in existence, still sending real people into the world!

When he called Ada she remembered the elder one's father being pointed out to her one Friday evening, proudly leading three young sons to the synagogue, how many years ago was that? She invited them in. Between them the two knew nearly every name the Samuels mentioned, who'd got married, who had died, whose bones were broken, meaning got a beating, last Corpus Christi when the peasants were drunk, and whose son was rotting in prison for belonging to the illegal Communist Party.

By the time the histories of entire families down to their third and fourth generation had been mixed up, disentangled and reconstructed, the young men were surer of their welcome and readier to talk about themselves. Yes, they'd come straight from the station. Ada put the kettle on and started cutting bread. And their luggage? They pointed to the two brown paper parcels. They had a change of underwear and socks, some toilet things and nothing more, nothing in their pockets or in their stomachs either, to judge by the way they fell upon the meal. Jacob said tst-tst-tst, how was that, to

come empty-handed to a strange land without even relatives to look after them till they got on their feet? Worse off than he'd been fifteen years before. They'd run away from home, they said.

'Ai-ai-ai!' said Ada.

Better that the parents had genuinely been unable to answer questions till they were safely out of the country, for Chimon at nineteen and Yankel two years less were both on the list for military service, and who'd want to be a target for the Jew haters there? And not only that, the police were on Chimon's track for distributing illegal leaflets, he hadn't slept at home several nights before leaving. Ooh va va, a farbrenter Communist! As soon as his plate was empty he sat arguing with Jacob as if he'd known him all his life. And the younger one, who seemed to have followed where the elder trod from the time that he could toddle, was equally convinced that revolution was round the corner.

They planned to go on to South Africa, having friends there who'd emigrated with their families, but first they wanted to have a look at London and would need jobs and a room of some sort. Till they could afford one they understood the Immigrant Shelter would let them have a bed. Ada at once offered dinners for as long as necessary, and the next day Rivka Rochel offered suppers, for were they not her landsleit also, and such nice ones, in spite of being so Red? They sat down to supper with Yossel the first time; and she hardly dared give them anything more than an egg, even so she heard the whole week about how she fed everyone on his sweat and blood, and after that if he came home before she could feed them properly she slipped them a hefty couple of sandwiches to take away. Azoi oisgehingert! The women shook their heads; so famished!

Chimon was broad-shouldered, deep-chested, serious, a man Wide-awake flat eyes darted observantly from his chunky, high-cheek-boned face, the wide full mouth overhung a small chin. His movements were sudden, decisive, impatient; emphatic square hands conducted his speech and a muscular knee revolved in his silence, as if to give his vitality something to do. Rivka Rochel, sitting next to him one evening at Ada's, exclaimed, 'From where springs so

much heat, from a furnace?' and moved away with a roguish glance that turned his face bright red to where the lank hair grew from a peak on his forehead. A huge grin revealed not only the entire upper row of big teeth that jutted forward a little in front, but also something vulnerable and appealing in the fierce revolutionary who argued with such fire and stabbed with a blunt forefinger to drive a point home.

Yankel was taller and slimmer, more spindly, and very much more a boy. He had heavy-lidded wide blue eyes, round pink cheeks still new to the razor, a nose so small they called it a button and a mass of tight curls he was fighting to tame. He soaked it with water and stooped to their mirror and broke every comb in the house one after another till Ada bought him a steel one meant for dogs, and now will you leave ours alone, Yankeleh? He moved like a colt taken yesterday from its mother, and like a colt he nuzzled up to Ada after a week had passed, wheedling for her kichlech, if she didn't look out a tinful could disappear at a sitting. A child still, that mother must be crying her heart out, nebich. Meemeshee he was calling her in no time at all; auntie. And so, after a longer interval, did Chimon.

Neither had a trade, each having earned their keep since thirteen at whatever was going in factory or field near their homes. Chimon, who'd sewn leather handbags in Warsaw for a time, was taken on in Yossel's workshop as a plain machiner.

'I told them I was experienced,' he said with his grin. 'I did not say at what!' He picked up the job by watching the others, and though the pay was meagre, he was soon quick enough to benefit from piece-rates. Yossel was always reminding him to whom he owed his luck.

'Hey, dee greener dee, nisht kein kleinigkeit, ha, to walk into a job straight off the onion boat?'

'He would like I should every day kiss his—er, hand for it,' growled Chimon. He got a room, all bed, in Whitechapel, in a narrow turning called Dunk Street, which stank. As soon as he knew a little English he said the last letter was wrong.

And Ada went next door to talk to the Greenglasses about Yankel. They gave him a week's trial in the shop, then a bed

and a place in their home, and he lived there side by side with the surviving son, in some ways filling the place of the dead one. After a while the immigrants stopped talking of South Africa. They'd begun to feel at home in England, especially in Meemeshee's kitchen. They kept coming for the evening, singly or together. Who knows, she thought, looking ahead. She hoped it might be Yankel, but she wouldn't sneeze at Chimon either. She said to Miriam:

'Say something to the lads, they are dying to hear a few words English.'

But that girl of hers, fifteen nearly, sat like a block of wood, reading, reading; looking up with a finger on the place to say the required few words and then back to the book straight away, or to her homework, practising the graceful shorthand outlines that fascinated her and flowed through in her dreams. They were men, talking politics, what could she say to them. Sometimes she listened to the ungainly words floating round the table. Proletar*iat*, bourg*eoi*sen, capital*ist*en, revo*lut*sieh, which her father said couldn't happen in England and the older chap said with his stabbing finger and eyebrows shooting to the top of his head, you nearly had one last year. Jacob broke into his musical smile.

'What, with police and strikers kicking a football round Hyde Park?'

'When the economic situ*ats*ieh gets still worse it will not be footballs they will kick.'

And Yankel said all human beings were the same to him, Jews and non-Jews, family and strangers. If his parents were trapped with others in a fire, he'd rescue whomever he could.

'Ach, Yankeleh, Yankeleh,' Ada shook her head. 'That's just talk. You would go where your heart pulled you, to your own.'

But he insisted. His conversation, when alone, was less political than Chimon's, lighter, more mocking, one couldn't always tell if he meant what he said. Since he was installed next door, he'd taken to coming in to the kitchen through the back, and if Ada was outside serving he got the biscuit tin out himself, munching provocatively in front of the little window; when she came to tell him off for the chootspa he

laid an arm round her shoulders and his head down on hers and said fondly,

'My meemeshee!'

What a shmoozer the boy was; yet she couldn't be cross with him.

Rivka Rochel said, smiling and nodding:

'So you make ready next door a bridegroom for your daughter?'

Ada compressed her lips for a moment. 'It is not as you say, Rivka Rochel. Two decent lads so far from home, and landsleit noch, I have done what only I could to help them. And Miriam, she has no such ideas yet in her head, it is too soon. But,' putting down her darning and arching her brows, 'if anything should come of it in later years, I would not be against! And nor would you, I think, for Sarah.'

Rivka Rochel laughed. 'If your Miriam is too young, is doch my Sarah still younger!'

Notwithstanding Sarah's youth, her mother had the same eye to the future as Ada. If God takes the trouble to drop two such heimisheh young fellows in your path, would it not be a sin to let them stray elsewhere? Ada was aware she'd been trying to get them to her house for an evening, officially, with Yossel's permission, but they hung back, those secret suppers of the first week still sticking in their throats.

'Go.' Ada advised them. 'Go for her sake, not for his, she so much wants to be gast-freindlich,' hospitable.

When they did it turned out badly. Rivka Rochel came in the next day, boiling. 'You know what he did, that oisvoorf, that benkert? Kept reckoning out the cost of every mouthful they swallowed, pretending he was joking! A meeseh meshine on him and his jokes! I told them take no notice, it's just his way, he wants you to feel part of the family, but they went away early, laughing up their sleeves. The swine. If he goes on like this who will come a second time? Nobody.' She could already see her thirteen-year-old daughter left an old maid on her hands.

She started bringing Sarah with her after supper whenever the boys were expected at Ada's; a good move from all points of view. The two girls together were bolder than either alone,

and presently were dragging their combs through Yankel's wild mop while he squealed, protesting, between them, and enjoyably tried fending them off; and each girl held down one of Chimon's very warm hands with two of her own for the fun of watching him struggle to talk without them, till with a final jerk of his shoulders and a toothy grin he said ruefully:

'My hands speak better than my tongue.'

They had an act that seemed specially designed to prove it. Yankel sat on Chimon's lap with his arms folded behind him, and Chimon, keeping his head out of sight against his friend's back, thrust his arms forward to illustrate whatever it came into Yankel's head to say. If he said it was chilly for instance, Chimon rubbed his own hands together and turned up the shivering boy's collar; if he complained thickly of catarrh, Chimon's hand pulled out a handkerchief and Yankel noisily blew his nose into it. Thus divided, the simplest action won a burst of laughter that grew louder when it went wrong, as when the speaker wished to read a newspaper and the borrowed spectacles were hitched across his mouth. Each time they stopped Philip and the girls shouted for more, and they went on to do Hamlet's soliloquy in Yiddish, and a little sketch from Peretz, till the hostess said enough, enough already, the poor lads will get worn out, and the host commented choking with laughter:

'The voice is the voice of Jacob but the hands are the hands of Esau.'

Rivka Rochel, who'd had to keep her legs firmly crossed throughout shrieked, 'Who needs the pictures?'

Nobody needed the pictures when those two greeners were there. When there was nothing else going on they were singing. They sang at the table before meals and after meals, and in between courses they trilled and hummed, carrying on the tradition of singing hymns throughout the Sabbath without waiting for the Sabbath or stopping at hymns. Songs of poverty and protest were their speciality: the cobbler urging his hammer to work faster because there's no bread at home; a bell of revolt ringing out defiance against religious tyranny; the coachman bringing home only the whip on Sabbath Eve, having drunk away horses and coach—this one, swelling to

a passionate close, brought out the women's handkerchieves. Jacob, who was also moved, laughed gently.

'They cry over a song, our women; over an imaginary family going hungry.'

Ada blew her nose. 'It may be imaginary, but it is true.'

At one such session Yenta scolded the boys, 'What is the madder mit you, must one beg on the knees for a love song?'

'Ach, too sentimental,' said Chimon, waving a hand.

'Too weepy,' said Yankel with scorn.

Instead they offered a lullaby:

From Siberia your father greets you, sleep my child,
a great hero has given you birth,
and you will become a hero too,
sleep my little one, ailulululu ...

Yankel's voice had a shake in it, but it was deep and dark, a backcloth for Chimon's higher, steadier, more colourful one, and with Rivka Rochel richly supporting, one could call it a concert. The three singers and their audience reminded each other of the next song and the next, and they sang several evenings through without draining that ever-brimming well. When they started on the cycle of rousing songs with Shah, shtill—Hush, quiet! Make no noise, the Rebbe is about to dance again!—they sang with such verve and stamped so hard that Jacob tapped one and then the other on the shoulder.

'Young man, if you have no pity on my ears, take pity at least on our electric lamp, see how it shivers with fright?'

They turned down the volume, but it usually crept up again before the end.

When they'd all gone one evening he said,

'A bit too much, night after night.'

'In the first place it is not every night, only two or three times a week. And second, it is not for ever. Wait wait. They will make other friends soon and have somewhere else to go, and what is more you will be sorry—oi, how sorry you will be! They bring a bit of life in here, don't they?'

He stabbed his teeth thoughtfully. 'I do not say no.'

The immigrants had been quickly included in Yenta's determined embraces, Chimon accepting them manfully,

Yankel winking hard over her shoulder. Her face fell if they were not there when she arrived.

'They do not come tonight, the boychiks? Oi, I'm azoi disappointed.'

But Abram wasn't disappointed. He had enough of them at the Club.

'Englander and Levine, Levine and Englander, that is all one hears there these days. The whole membership circles round them. No sooner over the doorstep and already they have made a Youth Section of all the hot heads and pick fights with the Central Committee altz princip.' On principle. 'Maybe they think to turn us into a branch of the Communist International. Or the Soviet Republic of Whitechapel.'

'What have you against them?' asked Ada. 'They are hot-blooded and idealistic, is what? They are young. They want to remake the world in one jump. Noo, they will soon learn better. But is the world so perfect in your eyes, or the Jewish Club even, that they do not need changes?'

'Changes yes, not turning upside down.'

'And who makes changes, old ones like us?'

Aha, he did not like that, I can see. Perhaps he thinks he is still a spring chicken.

But it wasn't only their politics he disliked, it was their brashness, he said, their noise, the way they leaped up and down the stairs, all over the building one could see them and hear them.

'Do not listen to him,' shrilled Yenta. 'You should see how all the women are in love with those boychiks! And not only the young ones!'

Abram didn't move a muscle.

Yes, they'd found their own background, the boychiks, with friends their own age and three thousand souls to win over to Socialism. Their energy and charm won them seats on one Committee after another. More of their evenings were spent at the Club, fewer at Meemeshee's. Rivka Rochel, coming round with Sarah a third time without finding them, exploded.

'They do not need us any more, is ois yomtov!' So the party's over!

'Do *you* go to somebody when you do not need them?'

Rivka Rochel thrust her chin out. 'Always you stand ready to defend people, whatever they do.'

But Yankel was looking in several times a day as before. He came to borrow a tool or beg a kichel or check the time, or just to have a little chat with his hand on the door-handle for a minute or two, like a child who interrupts his game to make sure the mother's still there.

When Ada and Lily were both struck down by flu in the same week, Ada groaned, 'God has punished me for complaining about her work. Only the other day I said she was not my right hand but my left. But even a left hand is better than nothing.'

Miriam had to stay home from school. First thing after breakfast she took up the saucepan with raw meat in it as far as the bedroom door so that her mother, propped on an elbow, gasping and feverish, could see if it had the right quantities of everything else with it.

'And turn up the gas till it boils, then down till it just just simmers, but look into it now and then, if it stops cooking where will you be, or worse still the gas can turn itself up and it will burn ... and Mirry, one minute! Do not give it to Daddy till it falls to pieces at a look, or he will say it is hard, God forbid.'

Then came bed-making, a bowl of hot water for Mum's wash, a hot-water bottle, jugful of hot lemon-water, the po to empty and clean out with disinfectant, ugh, but it had to be done. By the time she got down to the fireplace it was mid-morning, and on her knees in the dirty sack apron she polished her fingernails with the blacklead brush and was admiring the exotic result when, after the merest tap at the back door, Yankel appeared, snowy-shirted, curls wetly flattened down, immaculate. Of all the luck. And slapped his thigh when he saw her, threw back his head and howled, pointing to her nose. She blushed so hotly she felt she'd dissolve, and was rising to look in the mirror when he swooped, pressed his cheek swiftly to hers and went bounding upstairs to have a look at Meemeshee. With the fire still unmade she hastily scrubbed the black off her hands, washed her face,

tore a comb through her hair and stood ready to offer tea when he ran down. But he couldn't stay.

And Chimon took to coming to dinner on occasional Sundays, staying on with her and Philly when the parents went up to rest. Sometimes he showed her his exercises for the English for Foreigners class. The first was *My Favourite Author*, he'd chosen Maxim Gorky, naturally full of mistakes like wictory of the vorkers, and jumping from past tense to present in the same phrase, and most of the punctuation written in by the teacher in red ink, who nevertheless said at the bottom, very good, forcefully expressed. Amazing, he'd only been in the country a couple of months, and had no education except for religion. She got *Mother* out of the library. It wasn't too hard to understand, like Bernard Shaw's prefaces, for instance; on the other hand it was too easy to put down at the ends of chapters, whereas other books she wanted to swallow whole; like *Ann Veronica*, where her heart had raced over the love bits. The one thing that really stirred her in *Mother* was the speech by the revolutionary on trial who said death will conquer death, meaning his execution would rouse others to fight for a life worth living. Death will conquer death! she said proudly into her mirror, holding her chin high and trying to make her eyes flash. She told Chimon she preferred Wells to Gorky, and he said:

'Vells is a bourgeois writer, but Gorky speaks for the vorkers.'

Sometimes he stretched out on the sofa and sang whatever she asked for, even songs he and Yankel dismissed as sentimental in company. When he sang *Reisel* he just touched the words lightly, and she suddenly realised that Rivka Rochel gave the same amount of very hearty feeling to every song. After the last line,

Come to me in dreams, Reisel, come, come, come,

he closed his eyes and after a pause went straight on to one she hadn't heard before, *Benkshaft;* longing.

To whom tell my longing, my silent desire, to whom confide that lonely melody; perhaps the bird at my window? no he is drunk with the spring, perhaps the tree in my garden? no he is bursting with sap. To whom then, to whom, my longing confide?

And right through the song and even after he stopped, he kept his eyes closed but he didn't look peaceful, that big, forward-thrust mouth seemed to be wide-awake, as if searching for something in the dark.

'Are you longing for Poland,' she blurted out, 'for home?'

He swung his legs down, sat up straight and shook himself. 'Not for home and not for Poland,' and started playing dominoes on the floor with Philly. The shy little boy had taken to those chaps from the start, they'd had the sense not to pat his head like Freyda did, or pinch his cheek like what's his name, nor did they gush over him like Yenta, who still tried to make him sit beside her, she ought to know by now he wouldn't, was scared she'd start kissing and cuddling him. Chimon let Philly win the game, and asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up. He looked at the ceiling with those big solemn eyes and said at last a dustman, and when Chimon asked why, he said because they got a ha'penny from each house, and they smiled at each other over his head like two adults.

With Chimon she felt warm and comfortable and easy; with Yankel, agitated. It was the way he looked at you under those drooping eyelids with his mouth pursed up. If only she was taller, slimmer, better looking, she wouldn't mind. Lately she got agitated at anything or nothing, and even books, that had always cured everything from worries to heart-aches, couldn't settle the terrible restlessness that seized her those Sundays when Chimon didn't turn up for dinner and Mum and Dad nodded off at the table before pulling themselves together to go up to bed. She felt then as if she was inside that song of Yankel's,

Father's sleeping, Mother's dozing,
While my heart in tumult's leaping ...

She could have screamed or burst out of her skin sometimes,

wanting something to happen or someone to talk to, you couldn't count parents or a little brother as anyone.

Or those hot summer nights when they ran the tap to cool the atmosphere and opened the doors to set up a draught and all that happened was that the flypapers fell down with their horrible little black corpses and the walls and ceiling went on pressing you between them. As soon as Philly was put to bed with only a sheet over him, Dad carried chairs out on the pavement and called her to come too but she wouldn't. Up and down Wildwood Place and all the back streets round there everyone was doing the same, sitting outside their houses with arms crossed over bosoms or fanning themselves and shouting across to tell each other how hot it was. What, put herself on show like that no thank you; she preferred taking her restlessness out in the yard to sit on Eli's swing under the lilac tree branches that had lost their blossoms by then, till the air stroking her skin and the rhythm of slow swinging calmed her, and watching the stars come out over the chimney pots in the darkening sky she dreamed of strolling along those broad and noble rose-lit streets the bus passed through on the way home from Hyde Park Corner. She was wearing a black velvet dress reaching down to her ankles, she had pearls at her bare throat, and in her cloud of dark hair there glittered a jewel. A laughing companion strode long-legged at her side, but whose face, oh whose, under the gleaming top hat, it used to be Sammy, then Mr Davis ...

Her mother was calling from a sudden oblong of light.

'Mirry, you are there, what for all by yourself in the dark? Here, take this rubbish to the dustbin for me and put the lid back tight, or the cats will make a midnight feast of these fishheads all over the yard. And come, come in already, I am making the tea. You know what time it is? You won't be able to get up for school in the morning.'

The new school was OK now the strangeness had worn off of being the only Jewish girl there apart from Rose Kessler with the lovely profile who listened to her with her mouth open, partly through adenoids and partly through admiration, you're so clever, Miriam; all rot of course—how can you be clever if you fail the scholarship—but it made a change, being looked up to. The other girls were all decent,

no bullies or sneerers, and nobody had said anything about Jews so far, and all of them made fun of that nice Mr Tooke who taught shorthand and bookkeeping; a shame really, such a marvellous teacher, so patient and kind, but he just couldn't keep order and looked so pained when they were noisy, saying girls, *girls!* with his forehead all lines and his mouth an O, you couldn't help laughing, and Miss Arkle who had a turned-up nose and forehead smooth as a plate was a jolly good teacher also, and they didn't dare misbehave with her, if they did her square grey eyes sparkled and she went off like a bomb.

Funny, she didn't miss the old school, she thought she'd never get over leaving, well, she'd have lost Katie anyway, through her moving so far away, the time it took, and the fares, to get there; and Hilda wasn't the same any more, what with high heels and hats and speaking so mincingly all of a sudden. Who she'd most like to have kept up with was of course Mr Davis. That last time she saw him he'd put his hand on her head like a blessing, it warmed her through to her toes, and hoped she'd be a comfort to her parents in their old age, which astonished her; he usually said things that shocked you, one of the reasons she liked him, and coming from him an ordinary saying like that had somehow more weight than from anyone else. And also he told her to come and see him again but she couldn't, oh couldn't, go back in there and risk running into Scenic or worse still the Head, she'd die. It was a closed chapter, historic; she recoiled from re-opening the past.

Afternoons Mum kept her busy, saving up things for her to do between customers so that she shouldn't be idle, like getting down shabby parcels and putting new brown paper round them and making little tickets with the cost price in code for the new stuff, so you knew how far to let them bate you down (never let a customer go out empty-handed) oh and disentangling the elastics and tapes and shoelaces etcetera, why didn't they get separate drawers for heaven's sake? Look Jacob, see what your daughter's done, Mum would say later, and he'd say mmm! swaying his head, all an act to encourage her but it didn't work, she went on grinding her teeth over the stupid jobs.

Once a week she brought Rose Kessler home and then it was fun, Mum didn't mind, providing they didn't stand giggling or talking when a customer came in (always look busy, they should not think we have bad business) and after tea they went up in her room for French and shorthand homework and a jolly good jaw. Rose's profile was exactly like those Greek statues in the Victoria and Albert, forehead and nose practically one straight line, and lips and chin curving in and out just right, lucky thing. Frontways her cheeks were too broad and she kept her lips squashed together when she smiled because of a crooked tooth or two, even so she was beautiful, a big, full blown rose, and so good-natured, she wasn't offended when shown how to get her hands clean by keeping on scrubbing them till the lather turned quite white, only surprised and amused to see how long it took.

First time she came Mum and Dad were unloading the barrow and they stopped to smile and shake hands and she told Miriam later that her parents never took no notice of who she brought in, and when they went in the kitchen she'd apologised for the mess and Rose said what mess, it's so clean here I won't never dare ask you to my place. She came from a large poor family who kept yelling and screaming and hitting each other, and she liked coming to Miriam's because it was peaceful she said. Peaceful!

And Rose told her about boys she knew, and how they were always wanting to touch where they shouldn't, laughing with lips pressed together, and Miriam told her about Chimon and Yankel not being a bit like that but so interesting to talk to, and their ideas about changing society, in fact how to get to the kind of utopia Mum didn't believe possible but liked to quote from, by Bellamy; and she herself had now read one by Wells, about a revolution that had been a sort of business-like taking over of the country to run it more sensibly.

'What it all boils down to,' she told Rose, 'is that the workers create everything and get hardly enough to live on, and the bosses own everything and wallow in luxury, well, it's not fair, is it? Chimon and Yankel say the only way to end this, they call it the exploitation of man by man, is by

Socialism, which would end injustice and bring equality, like in Russia since the Revolution.'

'So those chaps are Socialists?'

'Communists.'

'What's the diff?'

Miriam didn't know, she'd ask them.

'My brother's always raving about Communists,' said Rose. 'He says they're the scum of the earth.'

'Chimon says the papers are full of lies about Communists.'

Rose thought. 'D'you suppose if we got Socialism or Communism or whatever they call it, everyone could have a coloured bathroom with everything in it to match, including the lav?'

'Of course,' said Miriam.

Then Yankel dropped in to the shop when Rose was there and she introduced them, stammering and blushing, but Rose never turned a hair, not she, not even when he looked her over under those eyelids. She stared him out, he was the one to turn away, and after he'd gone she said:

'I know what *he* wants, and what d'you bet me it's not Socialism?' and they staggered about in hysterics till Mum rapped on the window with her wedding ring.

Sometimes she brought Rose back on a Thursday, it was better then, they didn't have to waste the afternoon in the shop but could lark about or talk non-stop apart from homework. One Thursday when Dad was in bed with one of his rotten colds Mum had to take Philly to the dentist, leaving her and Rose to do the washing up, and make yourself and your friend a nice tea, Mirry, and for Daddy remember to pour out at the last minute, not before. They talked so hard that by the time they'd cleared up from dinner it was time to make the tea, and she was half-way up the stairs with Dad's when she recognised Yankel's light rap on the back door. Rose called up here's your pal and she called down half a tick, but Dad had only just wakened up, he had to do a pee while she turned her back, and clear his nose and throat, and he asked first for another pillow so he could sit up straight, and then for a tea towel from the wardrobe to protect the bedclothes with, oh hell, she could hear the

voices downstairs and was just darting away to join them when he said:

'What, one little minute you cannot spare to sit and talk to your father?' which transfixed her in the doorway but her ears were in the kitchen, she heard a sudden silence and a smothered cry of Mirry! and the back door slammed.

'Sorry, Dad, I'm wanted,' she muttered, and flew down.

Rose, flushed and dishevelled, was straightening her blouse.

'What's up?'

'Nothing.' She tidied her hair at the mirror, squashing a smile.

'So what d'you call me for then?'

'Aw, come on Miriam Samuels. Be your age.' She turned round. 'He went a bit too far, that's what.'

Thunder crashed in her ears, lightning split open her mind, gusts of envy and longing tore through her. She sat down, managed to say:

'Isn't it about time we got started on our homework?' and got up again to search blindly for her books.

Nobody must know, nobody; least of all him.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

She goes about in a dream, my daughter. Jumps when one speaks to her as if a thousand miles away. It is her age perhaps.

'It is her age,' she told Jacob when he complained that the girl had nothing to say to them.

'But to the young men she has plenty to say. Is she a different age with them?' His voice deepened. 'When they are here we do not exist.'

She could put up with it for herself, but not for him.

'Remember when you talk with the boys that Daddy is also here. He is not ignorant, you know. He can also have something to say. Do not leave him out.'

Miriam looked blank. 'Chimon talks to him about what's in the papers over dinner, and he goes to bed soon after. And Yankel,' she stopped. 'Who talks to Yankel? He's only here a minute at a time.'

It didn't help. She saw the daughter trying to remember the father, she saw her forget, she saw him withdraw, never one to push himself in conversation. When the family was alone he tried to draw Miriam into what he and Ada were saying, and she said mm—mm. He lay awake at night.

Leaning on an elbow in her bed she stretched her free hand towards him in the dark.

'What can you expect? She cannot be interested in our discussions about the shop or the market or what Chaya and Mortcheh talk about with us. It is not for her. And what she speaks with the boys she cannot speak with us. Do we read their books, do we go anywhere, see anything, meet anyone? No. When you have a chance to see a good theatre you find it too much trouble. To the Club on a Sunday evening, also not. We live like blind horses in a treadmill. Be thankful that your daughter will have a better life, that we give her an educa-

tion, that she will have a trade in her hand and go about among people. Children are not for the parents, it is the parents who are for the children.'

'Why do you make me a gantseh megillah?' A whole rigmarole? 'What you mean is that parents have no right to expect anything,' he said harshly.

'The less expecting, the less disappointing. She is not a bad girl, look how she helps us Saturdays from morning till night, and Sundays half a day. You think every girl in the sixteenth year would do so? And take comfort that she loves so much the little brother. That also is not so in every family.'

'I know, I know.' But he wanted something for himself, something more than just help. And so did she, so did she. Locked up the girl is inside herself, does not notice how we look or how we feel, and does not care. We must lie ill in bed before she does for us something more than usual.

But Lily talked enough for two Miriams. Gott in himmel how that shikseh talked, climbing slowly up the stammers and rapidly down the other side and away in a race that only outside intervention could halt.

'Oi, it runs out of my ears already—go go, get on with your work already, hang out that washing and mind not to drop it in the dirt like last week.'

Lily would clutch the piled-up bowl to her hip with one hand, and open the door gradually with the other, timing the final burst of speech to coincide triumphantly with her disappearance behind it.

Ada could have passed an examination in Lily's family history back to the grandparents on each side, including what the dead had died of, how the living made their living, the colour of everyone's hair and eyes and other distinguishing features. After history came current affairs, how much their dad had won on a horse; and how much, asked Ada, did he lost before he won? How many plates he and their mum had smashed, chucking them at each other in a row; Ada shook her head. When she and her sister started going out with two brothers she brought progress reports; whenever they went to the pictures she insisted on telling her who had said what about which—gevalt! If the girl's

work entitled her to the kitchen the mistress was driven out to the shop for a respite.

One Monday morning she came with swollen, downcast eyes and worked for an hour without a word.

'Noo, Lily, what is? Today you are too quiet!'

She broke down over the scrubbing pail, so racked by sobbing that Ada had to help the tall girl up from her knees and sit her in a chair.

'Here, here is a handkerchief for you. Let me hear already what is the matter.' And it should only not be what I think, for her sake and for mine.

'Those two brothers we goes out with, they starts p-p-p-pestering us lately, wanting ... you know what.' Aha! 'They keep b-b-b-badgering and badgering and me sister says to her bloke all right then, she let him, but me, I wouldn't. I keep telling him no, and Satty night after the pictures he takes me in one of 'em shop doorways we always goes in for a kiss and a cuddle and that.' Ada thought of Mortcheh looking down from his bedroom window, 'only now he tries to get me knickers down so I runs off and he shouts after me we're through. I never believe he means it and I turns up yesterday same place same time as per usual, and I stands there two solid hours waiting for him but he never come, and he won't never come no more, his brother told my sister, and I'm so blooming m-m-m-miserable I wish had the pluck to chuck meself off a b-b-b-bridge,' she wept.

'You should not even dare to think of such a terrible thing! With such a bad one you are better off without. He does not want to marry you?'

'He said he would—after—but I was frighten he wouldn't, not once he got what he wanted.'

'Lily, you did like a clever one. And your sister, she still goes on the same?'

'Oh yes, and I says to her at the start I says, more fool you, what'll you do if you gets yesself a baby, our dad's took his belt off to us for less many a time. But last night in bed I thinks to meself it's me's the fool,' and the tears rained again. 'I won't never get no one else, not with this ugly mug and me s-s-s-stutter and me s-s-s-squint.'

'Ach, silly girl what you are. With such a good nature

what you have, and so clean as you keep yourself, and always with a smile on you, I should have so many hundred pound notes how many boys will be happy to marry you, and he who gets you, he will be a lucky one.'

'Oh missus!' She put her arms round Ada and hugged her. Miriam never did that.

Touched and embarrassed, she said, 'Now be a good girl and hurry up with the floor before they all come back for dinner, and move away the sofa from the wall this time, yes?'

No, Miriam never came for a kiss, but on the other hand look at Rivka Rochel's Sarah, kutzeniu-mutzeniu with the mother one minute and screaming her head off at her the next. Would I like that?—no I would not. At least ours has no temper, or only a quiet one. Everything bad has its good side, and the other way round. Perhaps if we had encouraged her more to kiss, to embrace—yet look at Philipel, he himself stopped us from four years on. It must be in the nature of a child, something one cannot change.

Sitting over the last hot drink that night, she and Jacob with the papers, Miriam with a book, Ada looked at the clock.

'Jacob, tonight I want to have a good wash.'

'So have, gezinter-heit. Who is stopping you?'

'You know quite well who stops me.'

He put down the *Star* and stretched himself. 'M'ken leben, nor men lost nisht.' One isn't allowed to live.

When he'd gone to bed she washed her plump body in the bowl by the fire, first to the waist and then below, put on her nightdress and pulled out her hairpins. Miriam, she saw in the mirror, was not turning the pages.

'You worry yourself over something?'

Miriam started. 'Who, me? No.'

'How is it at school lately?'

'All right. Exams in two weeks.'

'So you worry over the exams?'

'No, Mummy! I should do OK. I'm all right in most subjects.'

'And what is with Rose, we did not see her last week?'

Looking down at the book Miriam said that Rose had a bad cold but would come again next week. There has been

some upsetting between the two girls, is that it? She wouldn't probe further, but wishing to hold Miriam's attention while she had it, she said, combing her hair:

'What do you say, Mirry, to cut or not to cut? Daddy says as I should do as I want.'

'No, don't,' she said mechanically.

'You know I am the only one left with my long hair, now that even Chaya has cut hers?'

Miriam looked up. 'The long part's got all the brown. If you cut it you'll have nothing but grey.'

True. But twisted into a bun who saw it; she doubted if Jacob knew what colour it was. She brought it over her shoulder and made one big plait for the night; it used to be thick enough to make two. They say one feels younger and freer without it, and it is one way of changing a little one's face.

The next day she suddenly made up her mind and went to Mr Cohen's, where the photos of the three sons in uniform were yellowing on the wall. She wouldn't have gone there if there'd been another barber nearby. He arranged her hair from behind to show her how it would look.

'Yes, go on,' she said, 'cut, cut.'

He was taking the first snip with the scissors when Miriam appeared in the doorway and went so white, it looked as if she would faint. Ada held up a hand to say stop to the barber, but it was too late.

'Daddy told you, I suppose? Sit sit down a minute, Meerkeleh. It will soon be over,' and forced back the tears that threatened to fall for the masses of dark hair falling, and because her daughter cared; she cared.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

'I see you read Marx's *Capital*,' said Chimon.

She sighed. 'My eyes read it. It just won't go into my head!'

He said with a little smile that it was too hard for most people to read on their own. Why not come along to the Youth Circle? They sometimes had talks about Marxism and other interesting subjects. When she asked hesitantly if she wasn't too young, he said no, for someone so interested it wasn't too soon.

She seized on the idea. Something new. Somewhere to go. And Yankel was there the whole evening. Here she was always listening for that quick tap on the door, or watching in the shop for him to come in, and when he did, there was nothing. He flashed in, he flashed out, leaving her trembling. Once he gave her waist a little squeeze but she pushed him off instinctively and he didn't try again. But she didn't want to be grabbed at, didn't want it like Rose. She wanted it slow, gradual, growing. Oh just once he'd actually sat down and talked when her parents had gone to Black Bull Lane and Philly was upstairs asleep.

'If two friends love the same girl,' he said, 'what should they do?'

She thought. 'They should try and see who can win her.'

'I say no. If they are true friends, one should stand aside for the other.'

'Oh, that would be silly! Let her be the one to choose. Besides, who'd sacrifice himself like that?'

'I know someone who did.'

Afterwards she wondered about that. At the time she was aware only of his slimness, his trimness, his heavy-lidded eyes across the table where she knelt on a chair, his sitting still and talking for her only, talking without teasing, letting

her see into his heart. She waited and waited, but it didn't happen again.

She didn't want to go on her own, and her mother didn't want her to come back on her own, so she went with Sarah. They felt ridiculous together, like Mutt and Jeff in the comic, the one tall and willowy, the other short and broad. And another thing, Sarah opened her dark blue eyes wide whenever she remembered, to make them look still wider, while she dropped the lids over her almond-shaped ones, hoping to look sophisticated. When they caught each other at it they spluttered.

The Youth Circle had a bare little room at the top of the Jewish Club's house. They came in uncertainly before anything had started, and when Chimon introduced them they got a big welcome, being the only English-born present, and the youngest by two or three years. The children, they came to be called; here come the children, the next time they came, somehow enjoying here a status rebelled against at home. Everyone spoke English, not minding how badly, though they slipped into Yiddish when the meeting began. And nearly all of them had given themselves English names by now, Chimon was called Simon and Yankel was Jack; it took some getting used to. But why did Jack nod so coolly from a distance each time? It bewildered her; as chairman and secretary both of them were surrounded by clamouring groups at every interval, but Chimon—Simon that is—always found time to say a few words to her and Sarah during the evening, however busy he was.

Individuals emerged from the new faces and names. Esther was small and round with great dancing eyes and bounced about before meetings, singing, laughing and jumping on chairs, but when Simon rapped on the table for order she pulled her small mouth down hard at the corners and sat obediently still till question and discussion time, when she leapt to her feet with vigorous interjections. She was a Communist, and so was Alan, who had keen grey eyes and clean-cut features. He spoke very well, and calmly, compared with the others, leaning back with his hands in his pockets and a sideways lift of the upper lip before sentences. Ella, a Zionist, was black-haired and rather muscular, with

level black eyebrows in a square, boyish face. When she spoke she gripped the back of her chair and swayed to and fro and quivered, while fleeting smiles seemed to apologise for her intensity. And there were Bundists and Socialists and Anarchists and a few non-party people like Bertha, over thirty for sure, and Sarah chortled behind her hand:

'What's she doing in a Youth Club, still looking for a husband?'

Bertha spoke in every discussion without saying anything in particular. She had a suffering face, a voice full of tears, and a body that seemed to drag her down. Tony, who drawled and looked sleepy, was also non-party; he brilliantined his hair and had a muddy complexion and said, when he was too late to help get the chairs out, that he'd had to have his face massaged, and Chimon—Simon—said shortly:

'What a pity it wasn't your behind.'

If an outside lecturer was expected, the older people came crowding upstairs.

'Oi, dolleleh,' cried Yenta, with a smothering embrace, 'I'm azoi pleased you come now, I can't tell you! You should force your mummy and daddy to come sometimes. And how is Mummy?' Miriam said she was well. 'And Daddy how is? And Philipel how is?' And the cat, why doesn't she ask after the cat; she'd just seen them all the other day, for heaven's sake.

Between public events they had their own discussion evenings. Shouting evenings, she and Sarah called them, as the Communists quarrelled with the Socialists and Anarchists, and the Zionists with the Bundists and each group with every other. She definitely disagreed with the Anarchists, Bernard Shaw having said in a preface that because a man could light his pipe without State organisation was no reason to suppose a whole street could be lit without it; and besides, didn't they throw bombs? Apart from them, she agreed with each of the others in turn. Of course society should be reformed gradually, not suddenly turned on its head by revolution. And of course it was hopeless trying to patch up an outworn system, far better scrap it and start afresh. And of course Jews should have their own country like everyone else did; and have self-Government in the

countries they had roots in; and not isolate themselves from their non-Jewish fellow workers but fight shoulder-to-shoulder for a better life for all . . . help! How to choose the right way when each looked so sensible and the fate of all suffering humanity hung on one's choice? If you were on the wrong side of the barricades you were a traitor to your class, if you didn't devote yourself to the plight of the Jews you were a traitor to your people. They drove each other wild with these accusations.

When they surged noisily downstairs for refreshments she asked Alan if it wasn't people's own fault that they were poor, through spending too much on drink and having too many children, and he said it was the poverty that caused the drinking, not the other way round, and it was poverty that brought too many children, and when she asked how, he smiled and was about to answer when Ella said sharply, slipping an arm round her waist:

'No, Alan! The children are too young, especially that one,' indicating Sarah. Oh damn, she must ask him another time. He was so logical, and so nice-looking, and nearly all of them were so friendly, and the discussions so fascinating, how had she lived without them before? It was this she'd been looking for all her life without knowing what to look for, and if only Yankel—no, Jack—if only he was aware of her existence; if only he'd go back with them, they'd drop Sarah first and have that little walk home by themselves, but no. He left promptly each time with one of the girls, not always the same one, and not always a pretty one, but always a slim-waisted one with a good figure. She inspected her shape critically in her dressing-table mirror which showed only half at a time, you had to tilt it rapidly up and down to piece together the two views.

But life had opened out. Little groups of them visited museums and art galleries on Sundays, and argued about bourgeois art, whether it was any good for the masses; and when Chim—Simon came to dinner they had so much to talk about they hardly knew where to begin and never got to the end.

In the spring they started rambles on alternate Sundays; to Box Hill, to Amersham and Chesham, to Epping Forest,

where she used to be bored when she went with the family on Yom Kippur; and it took a bunch of foreigners to discover Hampstead Heath for her when they didn't want to go out of town. Her mother made her a new tweed skirt for the first ramble, and a sleeveless white cotton blouse with a little collar she could turn up at the back. It suited her better than anything she'd had since Annie Mitznik's silver lace dress that she'd never worn a second time, it made her skin look warmer, her hair and eyes darker, and charged with joyful expectancy she waved to her parents from the corner and ran, light as the air that sparkled and sang that morning, to call for Sarah. Anything, anything could happen on such a day as this.

Jacob, turning from the doorstep, said, 'It does not occur to her for a moment to think how we will manage without her.'

'Ach, Jacob, let be. Children are children. One day she will think of it. This Youth Circle does her good, she has come out of her dream. You would want to hold her back? Then don't talk.'

Ten or twelve came along to the rambles, running noisily up and down the platform to find an empty carriage and manoeuvring for position when they got in. That older one, Bertha, managed to get next to Simon each time either by sticking to his side till they sat down or by pushing anyone else away; and Jack plonked himself between two girls if he could, squeezing himself in with an arm around each, instantly puncturing the day's perfection. He's in love with every girl in the world, except me. But even before the train moved off they were singing, not caring if they had the carriage to themselves or not, or what language they sang in or how loudly, so that she and Sarah didn't know where to look and Sarah chortled into her ear:

'England's a free country, so they're showing everyone how free they feel here!'

Simon, thick-set and sturdy in shorts, led the way from a Country Walks pamphlet, but if a notice saying Private offered a short cut, he'd wave them all through, not approving of private property, and when the girls complained about barbed wire or scratchy bushes he said:

'Who's forcing you—you can go the long way round,' but they were too scared of getting lost; and if a man with a dog or even a gun stopped them, he stood there arguing in his bad English, would you believe it, and sometimes the chap let them go on, saying just this once then, but sometimes he made them turn back.

'After the revolution,' said Simon, 'we'll take the place over for a holiday home or hospital.' He walked and talked a bit with everyone, and though he muttered she was a nuisance, he dropped back to keep Bertha company when sooner or later she started to limp.

'I like Simon better than Yankel, I mean Jack,' said Sarah. 'He's nice to everyone, even that sour-faced old maid.'

'Oh, but Simon's older,' said Miriam quickly. 'More of a man.'

Jack was always clowning. When they sprawled down for lunch he leapt from group to group like a goat, squatting by each one and swaying his head.

'Hmm, those sandwiches look tasty; what a fine piece of pie; lovely apples you've got there.' Everyone gave him something. Once Simon jumped up to say angrily:

'Don't be such a parasite! Is there a famine in your house? You're just too bladdy lazy to prepare your own.'

Jack threw his head back. 'What's your business?' They stood face to face, glaring, and Miriam, amazed, thought they were going to hit each other, then Jack uttered a short dismissive sound and turned away.

The boys stripped to the waist in the sun and tried to coax the girls to do the same.

'Why not,' Simon argued half-seriously. 'Why be ashamed of one's body? If we do it, why not you?'

When the day was warm enough, when the spot was private, Esther gaily ripped off her blouse and ran round waving it like a flag while the boys applauded; Ella stepped out of her dress without fuss, and so did she and Sarah and some of the others. The boys complained about the vests or petticoats hiding the most interesting part, but nobody was prepared to go any further, not, at any rate, in public. Sometimes couples formed and wandered away after lunch, while the others larked about till everyone re-assembled.

Sometimes they were caught in a downpour and scattered, shrieking, for shelter, sharing macs among several heads. Once she shared one, excitingly, with Alan, but when his hand slid up from her waist she nervously pushed it down; she couldn't allow such a caress lightly. But if it had been Jack? Her skin jumped at the thought.

And everywhere they left leaflets; in pubs, in cafés, in stations and trains. A demo in Trafalgar Square, a rally in Holborn Hall, the May Day march to Hyde Park. Once they went around with a collecting tin in aid of strikers; their fight is your fight, support your fellow workers.

'Can't you enjoy yourself without politics for one day?' She was walking with Simon.

'Does politics take a day off on Sundays? And those who strike to make a trade union, aren't they hungry on Sundays? No, the struggle goes on every day of the week, and it does not stop me from enjoying nature. I enjoy all the more when I do a small thing that can help the movement.'

Behind them Jack and Esther shouted to those further back:

'Vun, two, tree, four,
Who are vee for?'

and the response was yelled back:

'Vee are for de vorking-class,
DOWN wid de ruling-class!
Hip hip hooray!'

She squirmed. A good thing they had the road to themselves; not that it would have worried them if they hadn't.

There were peaceful times when they sang all together, lying on the grass after lunch or wandering in the flickering woods along the twisting paths, hand in-hand with whoever happened alongside, the singing drifting and floating disembodied—ah how lovely it was then, the song she'd first heard at the theatre years ago when dainty Annie Mitznik was a flower on the stage: Hey! whence the outcry, who art thou? and from all around they sang back: We are children of tomorrow, we are flying from the anvil, all ablaze and spurting fire, having forged out a morrow free of care. If

she'd lived she'd have been here with them now; her throat thickened with the sadness of the moment, and its beauty. And that evening by Virginia Water, all the scattered group sitting hushed along its bank as the smoky-gold sun sank into the trembling lake, listening to Simon singing a song new to her: The sun has long ago set and yet the sky's still aflame, be tranquil, be calm, my soul, you are not yet defeated; and her innermost being expanded, reaching out to take into herself for ever that sunset, that water, the song and all these people she felt she belonged to. The last notes still hung on the air when Jack leapt to his feet.

'Ugh! It is too soft and sentimental!' He began horsing around, laughing very hard. It shattered the mood.

Ella sat up, knitting her level black brows. 'What is so bad about being sentimental, what are you afraid of?'

Instead of replying he pulled her to her feet and whirled her round, but she broke away from him.

Now and then they ran socials at the Club, drawing members from all over the house to the hall that had a piano and a platform and space enough for dancing, at least at the beginning of the evening. Miriam watched Sarah with envy and admiration. The only one who was a match for her was that Tony who had his face massaged; when they took the floor everyone else stopped to look, especially if it was a tango. None of the other chaps were much good, shrugging and jiggling and stamping their way round, or standing round the walls out of their element, polishing each shoe on the back of the other trouser till it got too crowded for dancing and they put up chairs in rows for the audience and entertained them. Simon and Jack did their Voice-and-Hands act to warm the audience up, and it never failed; someone was ready to read from Sholem Aleichem or Peretz as soon as it was called for; it always was. Miriam recited a long poem at her first social, starting off squeaky with stage-fright but settling into the swing of it as she grew confident.

'... Our daughters with base-born babies
Have wandered away in their shame.
If your daughters had slept, squire, where they did,
Your daughters might do the same ...'

Verse after verse she declaimed, passionate, accusing, but not too carried away to notice that at the back they were slipping out and in the middle rows they were chatting. She stumbled, recovered, rushed on to the end:

'... Where the sage and the wheat and the barley,
Lie cankered and trampled and dead,'

and jumped down, face-to-face with Jack.

'What an extraordinary memory,' he said, when what she wanted to hear was how expressively she'd recited the most heart-breaking poem in the *Golden Treasury*. Abram Mitznik took her aside to say it was very nice but she must choose something shorter next time and she wanted to sink through the floor.

At the next social they had a Dutch Parliament, meaning questions could be addressed anonymously to anyone present. She sent one to Alan.

'Do Communists believe in Free Love?'

He strolled up to the front, put his hands in his pockets, leaned back and said, with that regular sideways lift of the lip,

'Free love is not on the official programme of the Communist Party, but speaking for myself I can say that marriage as an institution was developed by ruling-class men to make sure their property is shared among legitimate heirs, and to make sure their wives are their own private property also. In all classes marriage is considered the only respectable way for women to earn their keep, but generally speaking, prostitutes have a more honest relationship with their clients ...' He waved down interrupters and raised his voice. 'It seems to me a pity that working people, who have nothing to pass on to their children but debts, allow themselves to be trapped in a prison only the rich can get out of, and speaking personally again, I need neither Synagogue nor State to tell me when I am allowed to love, and whom. Any questions?'

Uproar.

'Who looks after the children in free love?'

'Who provides for pregnant and nursing mothers?'

'Free love is all very well for the men!'

'You Communists, you should be stood against a wall and shot!'

One man was shaking his fist, another seized his chair, rushed forward and had to be restrained from throwing it. Alan was smiling and holding up both arms for silence but didn't get it. Finally Simon went forward and banged on the table, and said it wasn't possible to have a reasonable discussion of such a subject at this time and place, but something would be arranged, and called for the next question. It was for him. He opened the slip of paper and went pale.

'Call yourself a Communist?' he read out, 'playing around and doing nothing while your comrades all over the world are tortured and imprisoned and even here there is unemployment and hunger?'

His eyebrows shot up. 'Who sent this?'

Nobody stirred. His eyes were round and hard.

'A pity we cannot see who is such an idealist that he never spends a sociable evening with friends! And these evenings are not for nothing, as he says. They make a few shillings to pay for our room upstairs, and for paper and stamps for the Youth Circle, where Communists and Zionists and others can hammer out their differences and sometimes work together for a cause they can agree on.' He strode rapidly from the hall, getting a sympathetic clap. What a shame. Miriam watched the doors, relieved when he came back five minutes later, smiling ruefully.

Socials were on Saturday nights and ended late. When she arrived home after midnight her mother was standing at the shop-door.

'That we do not have your help Saturday evening is not the most important thing. So long it is not holiday time when we are torn to pieces, I do not mind. Important is, you should not come home by yourself so late. My soul goes out of me, waiting.'

'Mum! From Sarah's house it's only a few minutes' walk! What can happen to me?'

'Plenty happens to young girls alone at night. Why don't you come together with Yankel, when he is one door from us?'

'Yankel -Jack always goes away with friends.'

'Always? And Tuesday night from the meeting?'

'He never goes straight home.'

'Then you should be home by eleven at least, socials, meetings, whatever it is.'

'Eleven! That would spoil everything!'

They compromised on half-past. No point in mentioning that Sarah didn't come to the meetings any more, and the last couple of Tuesdays she'd come home alone, running all the way down Stepney Green to avoid the roughs. Now that she had a job, shouldn't she be counted as good as grown up? She could take care of herself. She travelled on the underground, wore a hat and a handbag, bought her own paper and ordered her own lunch. On Saturdays she proudly handed her wages to her mother.

She worked in a shipping office in Cannon Street, on a great, threatening typewriter that invaded her dreams at night. As junior typist she naturally got the work the seniors didn't like, which turned out to be mostly Bills of Lading. Bills of Lading were typed on large sheets of stiff, expensive paper, six copies at once, with separate columns for the description of goods, the numbers of crates, their size and weight and value and charges; all this from rough, handwritten drafts. When her eye jumped to the wrong row of figures there were six lots of mistakes to rub out; bad enough, but oh, when it was too near the bottom and the whole set slipped ... and oh, the day she finished a monster without a single mistake, and found five blank sheets behind the first, her carbon copies in mirror-image on their backs ... And her perfect shorthand, that Tookie had so praised at school, wasn't nearly up to the rapid dictation at the office. She trembled and sweated and got in a muddle and had to keep begging one moment please, and started an evening class to work up her speed; how awful it would be to get the sack.

The two senior girls were older and smarter than she was, and much more refined and polite. They sprinkled their sentences with pleases and thank you's and would you minds, which she copied, and addressed the department boss as sir, which she wouldn't. He called her by her name so she called him by his, her blow for equality and fraternity.

In the wash-place they spoke of holidays, clothes and appointments; appointments was a much-used word and very smart, she thought. One of the girls was prettier than the other but neither had much expression in their faces or voices. Quiet, bloodless, only half-alive compared with the girls at the Club; another breed.

Once the novelty of going out to work had dimmed, boredom descended; a boredom more grinding than darning stockings or peeling potatoes or standing at the stall waiting for Dad to come back from his dinner, because there was no escaping on the magic carpet of thoughts, leaving your body to get on with the job. Here you had to keep your mind pinned like a struggling butterfly to what you were doing or you ran into trouble. And what you were doing hadn't the remotest connection with anything you cared about except the keeping of the job and the getting of the pay. She watched the clock and the days were long.

Real life was outside. She became minute secretary to the Youth Circle, she didn't have to get every word down and could transcribe her notes at home, taking her time. And she made posters for public events, putting her soul into measuring and spacing and centring everything up, drawing the words first in pencil and then, when she was satisfied, in Indian ink. They looked almost professional. She was finishing one on the dressing-table in her room when her mother came in and read out: SEXUAL DISEASE AND ITS EFFECT ON THE YOUTH OF TODAY.

'What—such lectures you have there?'

'Sometimes. Mostly they're more sort of political. What's wrong?'

'To this you should not go!'

'Eh? Why not?'

'You are too young for such things, they are for married people.'

'Mum! None of them are married there—only the old ones who come up from the Club.'

Ada folded her lips. 'Who asks you to come to this—Chimon? I am surprised at him, he should have more sense than to invite children to such lectures.'

'What do you mean children? I'm going out to work, so I

can't be a child! And he doesn't have to invite me, anyone can go, see, it says Admission Free. All Welcome!'

'We will see about it.' And Ada left the room, agitated. If Chimon was there she'd have protested on the spot, but she didn't know when she'd see him again. She must discuss it with someone—Jacob? Impossible. He'd go off his head, wouldn't sleep at night. She lay awake herself.

In the morning Abram came with his box of tools to see to the wardrobe door that wasn't closing.

'Good that you've come, Abram. First a cup of tea and a kichel, yes?' She put the shop-door on the bell, sat down with him at the table, and told him about the lecture; an effort to repeat that title.

'Ada, I have been for a long time astonished that you let your daughter go with those hooligans.'

'Hooligans? No, Abram, one should not exaggerate.'

'With the greatest respect, Ada, you do not know them. And you let her go away whole Sundays with that lot. You are not afraid what can happen?'

'I thought into it enough when she first asked to go. But it is not as if she is going with one boy; it is a whole group, and Chimon and Yankel are in charge. I have full trust in them.'

'You trust those Bol*shevi*kess, who believe in free love? Let me tell you, Ada,' and his quiet voice sank still lower, 'I would rather that my Annie lies dead and buried than mix in such a company.'

Her cup clattered into the saucer. 'Abram! What are you saying, Abram? Ach, no. What a thing to say.' She touched his hand in distress and at once it closed on hers. She withdrew it, but he held her with his eyes a moment longer. Then she stood up and mechanically put the cups and saucers in the sink, washing and re-washing them till she heard him go up. When he came down Jacob was home with the barrow.

'Noo, your wardrobe is like new again.' He took his hat, and Jacob said:

'Mentsh einer, why do you run away? Eat with us.'

'Yes, Abram, I have enough for all.' She was setting the table. He laughed his low laugh.

'You want Yenta to divorce me? She waits for me with a meal ready.'

It would be better for us both that we should not find ourselves alone. It makes a confusion. What does he mean? Yet I know well what he means, and I know what I mean also, and it is a narishkeit, a foolishness; old married people like we are, I forty and he forty-four. If long ago ... but if here and if there. Today I have a husband and he is dear to me, with all his faults, he is dear. And a nearly grown-up daughter. I should be ashamed. And about the other matter he is not right either; no he is not right. He thinks about Annie when she was twelve or thirteen and they went with her everywhere together. Today they could not do it. It would ruin her. She would have to find her own company, as Miriam has done. Those young men are not lobuses, and all what Miriam tells me of their Youth Circle I like only that Sexual Disease I cannot swallow down.

Later in the week Rivka Rochel burst in on her way to the market in overall and slippers.

'You know what, Yenta is in Hackney Hospital since yesterday!'

'What you say?'

'Yes, those boils she gets now and then down there, one of them turned to an apsiss.' Abscess she meant. 'All of a sudden she got a terrible fever, Abram told me last night at the Club. He took her into hospital and they wouldn't let her out again. They go to cut her tomorrow.'

'Ooh va va, that poor woman, nebich. If not one trouble than another.' They shook their heads over Yenta.

'You were at the Club for something special, Rivka Rochel?'

'No, just so. To sit in the bar and snatch a little gossip is also good! Our boychiks, as Yenta calls them, they were there, putting a poster up for their next lecture, and you should of seen the crowd in front of it—all because it has to do with yener zachen,' those things. She gestured with her chin. 'You know what I mean. Some of them says it is a disgrace, Abram also, but I had a whole argument with him, what's the harm?' She laughed. 'Maybe we are still not too old to learn something! What say you?'

'We are not too old, but maybe there is such a thing as too young. You will let your Sarah go?'

'Miriam didn't told you? Sarah stopped the last couple weeks to go to the meetings.'

So.

'She got sick of it, she says, talk talk talking a whole evening. My daughter is too lively for such things. And now that she goes with a boy she has no time, they go so much to dances.'

Ada put down the shirt she was mending.

'Your Sarah? With a boy already?'

'Yes, what you think of it—only yesterday she was in the cradle, it seems. He works in the same shop with her, a floor-walker. You should see what a smart feller, a giant, a six-footer, brings her back right till the door every time, if not from dancing, then from the pictures. He gives her a good time, pays for everything—he can afford, in his position.'

'And how old is this boy?'

'Twenty-two. Yes, I know what you want to say! You think I like it? But what good is it to say not? When I say find someone younger she opens a big mouth to me.'

'Rivka Rochel, you are right. It has no sense to say not, to big girls going out to work. They will just the same do what they want behind our shoulders. We can only give advice and hope they listen. Talk into them what can happen.' She picked up her mending. 'A Yiddisher boy at least, Sarah's?'

'Would my Sarah look at a sheigetz? Oopgeheeten zol men zein.' God forbid.

'Noo, is one worry less ... Yes, while we are talking, as you go now every week to the Club, would you mind to go Tuesdays, Miriam should not have to walk home by herself from the tram?'

'Sure. By me is no different when I go.'

A few days after Yenta's operation Ada put the meal on the table for the family, and hurried to the hospital, arriving at the end of the visiting hour; they let her in for ten minutes. The invalid sat up carefully. She wore a new, lacy pink bed-jacket tied with satin ribbons, and appeared to be blooming, but the lips she pressed to Ada's cheek were burning.

'You just missed Abram. For why you did not come early —I have been looking my eyes out for you—you mean to tell me you could not tear yourself away at the right time— I never saw such a woman!' Her voice was shrill and rising. Ada hushed her. Yes, she was still running a high temperature; the poison had run all over her insides, she said, before she got to the hospital.

'How I dragged myself round with that thing I cannot tell you. Left it a bit too late, and now who knows how long it will take, while my poor Abram stays all by himself.'

'Tell him he should come and eat dinners with us.'

'It is not the dinners. He is enough capable to cook and wash. Even my nightdresses he washes and irons and brings me here.'

Ada smiled ironically. 'Imagine if it was Jacob! He would be lost.'

'You have a daughter,' said Yenta, and broke into tears. 'And besides ...' She uttered a loud sob, and a nurse looked up from her table.

'Shah, Yenta, you will make yourself worse. What troubles you?'

'He is not a man ... who can bear ... to be alone.'

I see. Now I see. 'Yentashee teirinka, think only to get well, drive everything else from your head.'

'That is easy to say.'

Everyone has his own package of trouble.

The next day she happened to go to the shop-door just in time to see Rivka Rochel hurrying by in her best outdoor clothes.

'You do not come in, Rivka Rochel?' she called in surprise.

Rivka Rochel halted, embarrassed. 'Well, for a minute only.'

In the kitchen she unbuttoned her coat and sat on the edge of the sofa, opening and closing her handbag.

'You come from the doctor, perhaps? Something is wrong?'

She said yes and then looked round. 'The shikseh where is?'

'She is doing the bedrooms. Go on, speak, what is with you?'

She closed the handbag with a snap. 'Ada, from you I need not hide it.' Her eyes glowed, and her cheeks. 'I come now from Abram.'

Ada sat still till the room stopped swaying and the hiccups began, then she got up and made herself a glass of bicarbonate of soda, and drank its bitterness down to the end without pausing.

'You say nothing, Ada? You blame me for snatching a bit of happiness in my rotten life? He is so good, so handsome, so clean and refined, he treats me with such a respect, I love him since the first minute I saw him. You blame me?'

Ada said with stiff lips, 'Yes I do, but him I blame more. He has a wife who loves him. And you should know, Rivka Rochel, men at this age are not as when they are young. What he gives to you will be taken away from her.'

'When she comes home it will be impossible—it is only for now. And this *now* I will not give up,' she cried, 'even if you call it a sin.'

'Yes, it is a sin, to hurt someone when we can avoid it. Better is to hurt oneself. She has lost a child, her only child. Her life is already a broken one. She has only him.'

'And me, what have I got? What have I ever had in my whole life? From the grandmother, the birch, from the aunts, the babies' napkins to wash. No mother, no brother, no sister to care what becomes of me from that day to this. Only you, Ada,' she came and gripped Ada's shoulders, 'you have been to me a sister, the only one who ever interested herself in my fate, the only one I can talk out my heart to. Do not begrudge me my moment, Ada. Say you don't begrudge me, say say!'

'I do not begrudge you,' said Ada faintly, and disengaged Rivka Rochel's hands. 'But if Yenta ever finds out I will never forgive you, never.'

'She will not find out. I swear it.'

As she left a customer came in, and when Ada returned to the kitchen the meat and carrots were burning and the potatoes had fallen to pieces. She rescued what she could.

Philip came from school white-faced, with a split and bleeding lip.

'A boy tripped me, Mummy!'

She put iodine on it, and held him while he cried.

And he talked against free love. The hypocrite.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

That evening, the evening that blazed a trail into the future, they started late, later than their normal lateness. Word got around the building that the Literary Trial the youngsters were holding upstairs was worth a visit and the older members came crowding in, into the middle of the weekly argument. It started all over again.

'Yiddish, Yiddish!'

'English, English!'

'Mamme-looshn zol zein!' The mother tongue let it be!

'It's much too complicated for English.'

'Comrades,' said Ella, knitting her black brows, 'how will we ever learn to express ourselves properly in English if we do not use opportunities like this one?' A shout of laughter; she'd said it in Yiddish.

On a show of hands, mamme-looshn won—it always did.

And people kept drifting in after the trial began; at one point the murderer had to see about extra chairs. One of the late-comers was Rivka Rochel, who got someone to change places with her so that she could sit next to Miriam and Miriam had to explain.

'It's taken from a Polish novel,' she whispered. 'The hero's a carpenter with five kids and a nice-looking wife. Simon's the carpenter, Ella's the wife. He works in a small factory, Jack's the boss. Bertha is the boss's mother.'

Rivka Rochel laughed. 'Quite right, she's old enough.'

'Shh ... shh. The boss tries to seduce the carpenter's wife ...'

'What means seduce?'

'He, er, he wants to—to make love to her.'

'Aha!'

'But Simon catches him just in time and chucks him out of the house and the next day the boss chucks him, Simon, out of his factory ...'

'Voos far a mamzer!' What a bastard.

'Look.' Miriam flushed up. 'We'll miss everything if you keep stopping me.'

'Look look, how excited she gets! I remember you when you were still in napkins! Noo, go on. I'm listening.'

'The boss tells all the other factories that Simon's a troublemaker, so he can't get work anywhere, the family's starving, and he's worried about his wife, he thinks she's in love with Jack, with the boss.'

'Tst-tst-tst.'

'One day Jack has a party at his house and Simon breaks in and kills him ...'

'A sheineh reineh kapooreh oif em.' Jolly good job too.

'That's the end of the book,' said Miriam rapidly, 'and the beginning of the trial. The audience, that's us, will have to judge whether Simon's innocent or guilty.'

What the actors said was supposed to fit their characters in the book, and to stick to the point, but they couldn't resist making rambling political speeches against each other, including Alan, prosecuting, and Esther, defending. Rivka Rochel yawned.

'You know what,' she whispered. 'It's half-past ten already.'

Miriam didn't answer. Bértha was on her feet, and she was good. She raised heavy eyes to Simon.

'If my son had been ten times the devil you paint him, it was not for you to take away his life. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay! And he was my son, my only child, this womb bore him, these breasts suckled him, here are the hands that raised him to manhood, and what am I now but an empty shell?' She raised her voice. 'Cursed be he who sends the child to the grave before the mother!'

Under cover of the applause, Rivka Rochel said, 'I can't wait any longer. Coming?'

Miriam shook her head. Simon spoke directly to Bertha.

'Mother ...' She shrank from him, her hands over her ears. 'I beg your forgiveness, mother, yours, before God's. But be comforted that your son was despatched with one swift blow from this world to the next.' He faced the audience.

'I ask you, and you, and you,' stabbing a blunt forefinger

and raising his eyebrows as high as they'd go. 'Is it not murder of innocent children to take away the father's livelihood? Was it not death, slow and tormenting, that daily shrank their young faces and made larger their eyes? Yet he, he who snatched the bread from their mouths, the smile from their lips, sat warm and comfortable with glittering guests at a loaded table! Watching from outside the winddow, I thought of Peretz's sacred poem.' He clenched his fists and actually turned pale as he ground out the words:

'Do not think the world is a tavern, created
to force a way with fists and nails to the beer barrel,
to gorge and swill while others
stare glassy-eyed from the distance ...'

She felt her sleeve being plucked, and jerking her arm away hissed, 'Leave me alone!' Rivka Rochel got up and pushed her way out.

When Simon finished the poem there was a moment's silence, broken by a voice from the back.

'You couldn't feed your family properly even when you were working. Why do you make so many children?'

Simon raised his head. 'Because I am a man,' he said strongly, 'with a man's desires.'

Miriam gripped her hands together and leaned forward, her eyes on his face.

I love him. The knowledge fell into her head, into her being. She blinked and looked again. Yes, I love him.

Her mind was clear, her heart was calm, her blood flowed sweetly.

Yes of course, it's him I love, and have loved, long, long ... not realising, not understanding. Idiot. How eagerly you waited for those talks, what deep contentment when he came, what pleasure in the sound of his voice. All growing slowly blindly underground.

Till this moment, till those words. Like a burst of sunlight. Like a shower of rain.

I am a man.

With a man's desires.

Gladness filled her. She sat very still, not to spill a drop. But rose with the audience after the vote was taken,

innocent or guilty she didn't know which, floating down the stairs along the street hovering at the bus stop how long it didn't matter, last bus packed out Stepney Green please she said thrillingly to the conductor and he, smiling, let her stand on the step holding the bar all the way face lifted eyes shut delicious the wind on her skin in her hair against her clothes; and stepped down lightly still afloat through wide deserted Stepney Green along the High Street dark and narrow where she came to earth with a small bump, seeing her mother huddled in a coat on the corner looking both ways, who bit her upper lip when she saw her coming, pointed to the church clock striking one but grimly said nothing till they were indoors, when she burst out quietly, not to disturb Jacob,

'Already an hour and a half since Rivka Rochel came to tell me you wouldn't go with her. She was shaking with fury and no wonder. Even a cup of tea she wouldn't sit down for. Tell me,' she stretched out her hands, 'tell me what sort of creature are you? You care nothing for another person's feeling? Not for hers, knowing how Yossel is when she comes late, and not for mine, knowing you go by yourself in the middle of the night, a girl of sixteen.'

'Nearly seventeen.'

'You gave me your word to be home by half-past eleven! And to go with her together. Your word means nothing to you?'

'I just couldn't leave in the middle, Mum. I couldn't, Simon was so ...'

'Simon here, Simon there,' her mother said violently. 'Abram was right. They lead you in a bad way, those two. I wish the train that brought them here had run over them instead!'

And all night a huge train roared relentlessly towards two helpless figures on the track. Each time it reached them she flung herself round in bed so that they were never actually killed before her eyes, but then it started again. And it was her mother, her mother, who'd willed it.

Exhausted and sullen in the morning, she refused breakfast but swallowed a cup of tea, helped her father push the barrow over the ridge at the side gate and barred it behind him;

found Philip's school satchel under the sofa while her mother was shouting:

'A special hook Daddy made for it behind the door!'

Hat, coat, bag, gloves, she was ready. Ada stopped her.

'I should live to see the day when you have children yourself—especially girls—then you will know the taste. But what I said about Chimon and Yankel—you should know I did not mean it. I wish them no harm. They should live and be well.'

She said nothing. She felt nothing. Words. This morning's words couldn't undo last night's words. She opened the door.

'You go away for the whole day without a farewell?' Ada nodded, smiling sadly. 'Broigess mit a mamme?' On bad terms with a mother?

Miriam looked straight ahead, muttered Bye and marched out.

After supper that evening Ada missed her footing on the dark cellar stairs and fell headlong, striking her head against the wall at the bottom. Miriam heard a heavy thud, a sharp cry, then silence. Her mother lay upside down on the stairs, unconscious.

'Mummy!' she screamed. 'Mummy, mummy, mummy!' Righting her with difficulty she found herself showering kisses on the ashen face. Ada stirred and moaned.

'Dad!' she shouted, and again, 'Dad!' He was in the shop but heard her at last, slammed the street door, and rushed to help her bring Ada up and lay her on the sofa. A sip of whisky brought the colour back to her lips.

'Have I got a headache,' she said feebly. 'You shouldn't know of it.'

'Ada,' breathed Jacob, trembling. 'My dear, dear Ada.'

The doctor said that nothing was broken but she'd need a day or two in bed, and to take this. Miriam ran up and down, making her comfortable for the night, then fell into her own bed and instantly into a deep sleep from which she woke after a few hours hearing again the heavy thud, the sharp cry, the silence; the heavy thud, the sharp cry, the silence ... oh no no no no no, and springing up, she crept to her parents' door and opened it quietly.

Ada was gently snoring.

I didn't know I loved my mother.

And I didn't know I loved Simon.

Where was it all hiding?

She drifted in and out of sleep and woke finally with a gasp.

And now?

CHAPTER TWENTY

26th July 1929

Dear Miriam,

I always thought very good of you but now my opinion improved. It is true, we have never time to talk enough or always there is too much peoples round about us. Yes, you will write your questions but dont take my answers for sure, I mean permanent. I want you should study things yourself get your own outlook on maters surounding you. How is your new job, I hope you are satisfied.

Yours faithfully,

Simon.

. . .

7th August 1929

Dear Colleeg (not pupil),

You ask isnt it proof that a man is not fit to rise if he remains down, and you bring me examples like your new boss who was a poor Jewish boy thirty years ago, and your father's market neighbour starting from bootlaces and making now big competition to him, and others such. And again your feeling heart hurts for your both parents working over their strengths, and so cramped and timeless for all things exept only bisness.

First you must realise that all people like your father has the weekest position in our sistem. Take those big companys, they are important, society cant manage without them, then take the working class, society cant do without them, they too are important. Now a worker can strike because they will not manage without his work but if your father closed seven instead eight it would make no harm to any body but he shivers to loose that twopence or threepence, he cant closed at one on Thursday or go for a week holiday with your mother together because the people will get their wantings

at another shop, well now you see his week position.

Of course capitalism does make room for a few sharp-brained ones to clime up from the bottom to the top, (or the middle, like your friends brother who becomes now doctor). And not always it is sharp brains but a not-careness for treading down the one underneath you to get up top yourself, I mean not the doctor but a big boss like your's.

I thought you'l begin your questions entirely diferent, you see people in your districk in so much poverty, people living like a dog, more and more people without work. Your question had to be why is that? Begin right on the botom than you graduly come up to all those milions and there would be the question the big one WHY ALL THAT? and you would come to the true conclusion (acording to me) it is our sistem our bad sistem and everything would be clearly.

Now again some time I look at your parents and think they are the most fortunate people, I mean in family life. Just take Rivka Rochel and Yossel, their life is easier, she works half as your mother and he has one and half resting days and they could be happy but . . . need I say to you more. The only thing that maters in your house is your fathers bad health and that overworking bisness and dont you think he lost his oportunity for a beter position in his soldier days?—now you see whose fault it is and it is surely not his neglectingness.

But my dear Miriam some time I think that if people would not feel only there pain but also of his fellow man our life would be much beter.

I am sory for my uncorect writings, this English is like a heavy wait on my tongue or rather pen. But you will understand wont you? Yes, well I thank you.

Yours (but not Teacher)
just
Simon.

. . .

5th September 1929

Little comrade,

You write that as a result of Wells' writings and your own ideas you think that 'except for circumstances a capitalist is not a worse man in character than a working man'. But I as

a marxist and materialist think that it is circumstances mainly economical that make up the character and the ideas of men. A capitalist thinks that the world is and must be as she is now. A worker (class consious) thinks that state of afairs must be changed, at least he should think so. Why he doesnt?—well thats a diferent question and Id like to hear your opinion about it.

To folow on our discusion the other night, dont you think that a great part of our life we spend in fight against the contradictions within us? Why to devil, god or nature are we created with head and heart—soul and indigestive aparatus—fists and simpathy—dreams and reality—why? and can one do things for humanity while within him a sea is raging, a stormy sea which may became so fierce as to drown him, shouldnt one first make peace within himself? I realise that the fight between the individule and the outside world is only because we have a corupt and roten sistem but will then the change of sistem stop the fight within us. Perhaps it will, but we are so far off that time when man will have harmony within and without—or to put in proper order—without, then as a consequence, within.

Yours fraternally,
Simon

. . .

28th September 1929

Little Miriam!

To me is most remarkable that I do have some exeptional pleasure to read your letters. Something in them appeals to me and that is that great understanding or wanting to understand. Now I want to tell you something in your ear, that I do not know where do I get the patience from to write those letters to you because even in Jewish which is much easier for me sometimes I cant finish the letters that I begin. When I write to you I am under the impresion that I speak to you and I do like when your big eyes open themselves like to swallow everything that is spoken. Some times I have something on my consious, why I dont leave people in peace, why I spread unhappiness in there soul, and my only answer is then those big eyes which look at me like saying oh yes, its good to suffer, to understand, it makes you feel so much,

it makes such fine outlook for arranging all things so beautiful and happy.

Yes my dear your seventeenth birthday means quite a lot. But I dont like your idea that it means the begining of your dissatisfaction with yourself, get out that childish idea off your head, one thing is wrong with your understanding, you are taking life in a too extreme way. We grown up people must take life as easy as possible because if we shall take it so difficult as it may look to you it will destruct our believe that we can change it. Not right, life is something that can be changed and must be changed, our ownly task is then to quicken it.

At last I hope I am making correctly all those double letters your English language, though what for are they so needed I never shall know. But I do thank you for your corections.

Goodnight to you,
Yours,
Chimon.

. . .

5th October 1929

Miriam my dear,

I was really upset with your letter even although you have said it was just a bad mood and will pass away. It does hurt me that you have so much sufferings about your family, but —to be honest—I think you are exagerating, and that is may be because you did not see yet how much more worse and ugly life can be. Is it so serious if they sometimes scream at Philip, they do not hit him or neglect him, it is the conditions that we must blame. You have mentioned yourself that he is well fed and dressed and his health is cared for very much but I do wonder if you appriciate what that means.

Take for an instance my house where all ways we were hungry as during the war when we had potatos and milk but no more and after eating I used every time go outside and was sick because every meal was always the same ... and my oldest brother beat me with a lump of wood till I grew enough big to do to him the same, and where my father locked me from the house in winter with snow and ice if I was late back from a meeting so that I went to sleep with

the horse and the cow in the stable till my poor mother crept down in the midnight to let me in . . . and when I was to run away to England I had no trousers without mendings and I stole my brothers, that one who beat me so I was glad to take away he's.

I am telling you these few examples so that you can make the comparisons and see your life in its right proportion.

What is really a shame and here I am in agreement, is that your mummy has pains here or there and your poor daddy with his nose-blowings and bronchitis, which like you say if they could make a holiday to the South of France it might help them. But as we know such things at the present moment are only for the rich.

In deed I am a little lost how to ease you, only try my dear to see the good as well as the bad in your home, because as you know it yourself there is also so much sweetness and kindness there.

Yours,
Simon.

. . .

15th November 1929

Yes my dear friend!

I too 'when I sit down to write to you many things rush into my head.' But I will keep to your questions because there is so many, you must have been storing them inside your little head all this long time that we both of us were too bisy for writings.

Egoism, as you write, is natural and primitive, a natural necessity. But of course it has its measure. We see some exeptions, people giving up more than they should, and to me these people are as uncorrect as those who cant sacrifice nothing for the sake of humanity. You have read Berkman's memories, there you see one exeption.

'Whether people are getting more, or less, egoistical when they get older?' Well we find quite a number of youngsters which are rather pro-egoistical, on the other side elderly people which are rather anti-egoistical.

Then you write about intelligent people laughing at their youth ideals. To me they are non-intelligent. Intelligent people could and should never laugh at the ideals of their

youth. Their brain could not have been so much dried out as not to realise that youth must have its time of wild dreams.

'Adults become narrowminded by concentrating to earn more, get a better home and furnitures.' Well I would wish that all of us should become so egoistical as to fight for those betterments, we need only the knowing that in collective we can get it quicker.

'For the women better clothes, better education for their children.' How beautiful and good that would be! A married woman was telling to me in her house that she was much more interested in literature and social life in former years than now. Of course my question came 'Why?' and she called me round the other room and showed her two little babies sleeping and said, 'Thats my culture and social work.' Would all mothers do the same, our future generation would be the most perfect.

Wonderful winter sun sends its last greetings into my poor room. Nature does not make diferences between slums and palaces, yet how and why did they made of life something dusty, muddy, mechanical, isnt our human life one of nature's creations too, its most divine and perfect creation? but crippled and turned into an ironical mistake of fighting for crusts of bread? Oh what an absurdity these exploiters have made out of life, wipe them out—kill them—do whatever you think it will end them quicker.

Yours,

Simon.

. . .

19th November 1929

But my good girl,

Dont think by any means that I teach you to hate, o no, love is it I teach, love your fallow human (including me, ha-ha), but fight against everything bad and inhuman. One who fights is not a hater but a fighter, love all those who suffer for the same cause and future. 'Kill them'—hmm, did I really said so? It must have been my bad mood which I will tell you why when I will see you, it is too long for writing on it. Honestly Miriam it is not people we want to kill and wipe out but the sistem of exploiting. Only I am afraid when it shall come to that moment it is they which will want to

kill us because they preffer that it should go on the same for
ever.

Oh yes I did really liked your dress but I would like to see
you in it far away not in that overcrowded hall. Why my
dear, there is so many nice places where nature is beautiful
and charming. Will we ever see them? Lets hope. Hope!!
that sweet disappointing music....

'Beauty that hurts, makes you nearly cry and yet makes
you happy.' Thats the power within us, a connection of
brains, nerves, a metafor called 'soul' which dominates our
feelings and moods. If I'd be an artist I'd draw that creature,
soul ... just two wings without any body.

And I too feel when I write to you that I speak with you
'there where it is quite still and the leaves are murmuring
and overhead is the moon'.

Now will you allow me to ask you a little question and
if you can answer on it I will always love you. Why am I
so lonely? Why so melancolicle just now? Why shall I not
be happy?

So pardon the same,
Simon.

. . .

23 November 1929

Wonderful comrade,

Can I write it on paper or could you realise how thankful
I am to you for just those few lines you have written to me.
Yes, one must have a soul, a deep understanding for another
soul, to write like you did in your letter. Youve said it, one
can have hundreds of friends yet the more one has the less
you can call them friends. No, they do not understand you,
they do not bother to understand you. As long as you can
amuse them they stick to you just like a bee to its flower but
nobody can be always interesting and then I feel that my
words fly about in the room and I am just a gramophone.
Thats of course only in social life. But even in private life
they understand me only phisically, I mean now my female
friends. They think too much of the boy in me, ignoring by
this our mental equality. And it happens to me just as to
every human soul that I want somebody to understand me
spirituly, to who I can open my inner soul, and then there

is scarcely one who should like to just sit and listen or even not listen but just sit with you and it may bring some release to your aching.

Yet you have understood that Simon like every body else is only human. Yes, it is the loneliness of spirit, the jump from Poland to England, from the small town to the big city, from a dreaming phantasy to a consequent phantasy. I remember when I first thought to leave my house and go out to the wide beautiful world, I dreamed to be a writer and paint every thing I have seen, but dreams fade away just like night darkness when the sun drives towards west. I think very often isnt it better to pass through life dreaming than live with brutal reality.

But you are great, you have understood me! and there is a curious feeling now within me, that is if you would appear just now in my lonely room I would kissed you. You dont mind my writing so? and if you do?

Goodnight to you and may God bless you,

Chimon.

. . .

5th January 1930

Dear little friend,

Here is your letter before me. Ive read it last night about twelve oclock and fell asleep while thinking over it, and curious enough I dreamt about it. Did it ever happen to you that in your dream your trying to solve a problem. Yes, that was my dream ...

'What my life is going to be?' Good comrade, cant you for any sake make peace with that idea that we are not directing life, even our own, but life-conditions are directing it. Isnt even our strongest will-desire broken to smithereen by conditions ... and I had some expirience of that kind ... So how can one know what his life is going to be?

'What I expect from life? Do I want anything from it? Is it wrong to want happiness from life?' Good Lord! How can I answer on those questions not to you only but to myself. Because first we must make clear what we mean by happiness. A lot is imagined about that fantastical creature which indeed has so many sides to it, as example—abstract or sentimental happiness which we get from beauty, love,

goodness—and health-happiness of the body when it is functioning perfectly with itself and has bread, shelter and clothes. And should one be so fortunate as to have all these things, is it possible to be happy when we see all about us the misery of our fellow man who has not got any or very few of them, could we close ourselves up within four walls and be happy without not to lift out our hand to those other ones? I say no, it is not possible, the feeling of solidarity is to much developed within us to withdraw ourselves from the fight of our fellow creature, from the fight for bringing happiness to all even although we shall not live then ourselves.

I know you to much, to much is there in you the want-desire to know everything, to much is your soul suffering, to much you see whether you want it or not the misery of life surrounding us to think for happiness just for yourself. I would never acuse you that you meant that when you wrote, 'I want happiness!'

(There is a white and black spotted cat looking at me through the window as if reminding me that it is time to stop.)

Goodnight, good Miriam, good night.

Simon.

. . .

February 27th 1930

Darling (without apology),

There is a reading lesson here in my evening class and I am terribly bored by it. So I shall try and write to you if I can concentrate because there is a fellow reading and he has a voice like a rolling barrel. But what a wonderful ramble we had, didnt we? I was sitting at my sowing-machine in the workshop on Monday and suddenly I burst out laughing. They all looked at me and thought something must be loose with that fellow. They didnt see Peter standing like a general inspecting us passing by and they didnt see how they shovelled Fanny on to the stallion. I am laughing even now. And poor Miriam marching bravely in the mud with cold wet feet, ambitious and beautiful.

I have decided on something since Sunday ...

There was a great question mark that puzzled and muddled me. What are my relations to you? There was impulses and

instinctive riddles within me and that was going on for many months, but the Sunday ramble I do not know how made things clear and wonderful. There is a tremendous friendship between us which I cannot name it, call it platonic but no more, and now everything is wonderful and good with our friendship, if you would know how it releases ones soul.

And now a question for you. Must love, true love, be called so only when there is phisicle relations? A queer question to ask a young lady in your age, ha-ha.

And so goodnight, my little darling friend,

Simon.

. . .

March 4th 1930

Comrade!

Curious indeed, that you too went through the same phase and made the same conclusion on it. Indeed there is a harmony, a mental harmony between us. So then let it be as Jack London has named it, a great white friendship between a man and a woman. And I dedicate these words to our harmonial friendship:

Love—bewinged with early dawn,
like white wings of morning rays,
when sun and earth uncover and embrace.

(Dont laugh!)

I just want to mention that I doubt the need to be so careful with the word love. I can assure you that I shall not misunderstand you. But I want to tell you that when your letter came I looked through all those from before, and I thought I saw a silvery thread running through them, like the silvery stream running downhill in the sun. Oh if that silver thread could transform itself into speakable matter it might have told us something, something beneath our conscious minds.

No I do not think at the moment about going away. You could not bear it? And how could I? So lets forget about it, lets. What a pity that man could not live a first hundred years for the sake of expiriencing how to live his next hundred, perhaps he might live the second half more fully. But havent we then the expirience of millions of years before us? I think Im making myself unbearable and should stop.

Now then. I would say that our letters become too per-

sonal and consequently loose their importance (not really!) Therefore I challenge you to start again with a new problem for our future correspondence. Agreed?

Cheerioh!

Simon.

. . .

April 24th 1930

Dear ——

Those two days, like two flags on ship-point, pointing out the eternity of sailing. Like two white pigions running out in the darkness where your eye looks for release.

Two beautiful days, wasnt it—now you can see them or feel them. Well, two perfect days, wasnt it? A pity they were only two. A big blue sky, everything so blue and big and that monster sea. We have learnt quite a lot of each other, I dont know about you but I did. And yes, about that question I was asking you—of course our heads are stronger than our hearts. I have only kissed you in forehead ...

And now London, everything so close and small.

Two perfect days. I will remember them. And so will you.

Chimon.

. . .

May 2nd, 1930.

Dear Little Miriam,

Yes, those two days. We still are smoking the opium they have left after their disappearance. You will have them again some day. Some day we shall reach to our autumn, and we shall look back to our spring-summer and it will be so good and wonderful if we shall be able to record good useful beautiful memories, we shall not regret them but marvel at their past charm, that we had lived and filled out our life with dew green flowers instead with rotten straw as some people.

Now Miriam, Miriam! I really was in your garden when you ... me. (I won't write it, its too holy for me.) Wonderful, it was like the natural blooming of a white flower out of a tree, a great white friendship blossom....

Goodnight to you and to me, and to your deep longing eyes; goodnight.

Simon.

O no—don't quote to me:
'The sun has long ago set'.
To me on the contrary I preffer better the last line,
'Be in peace and quiet my soul. I have not lost
nothing as yet!'

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Rivka Rochel, wedged in her corner between the table and the sink, was finishing her second breakfast.

'You know what, Ada, if you wouldn't mind I will peel here my potatoes for dinner, then I can stay a bit longer.'

'Mitn besten fargeneegen,' said Ada, with the greatest pleasure. 'And so they should not go black I will lend you this old pot, see, with the handle broken off. Even with water in it you can easy carry it home.'

'Vee s'iz doo Toiréh iz doo chochmeh,' said Rivka Rochel admiringly—roughly, where there's learning there's sense.

'You heard something yet from Miriam?'

'Yes, this picture card came in the morning.'

'I didn't brought my glasses. I suppose they have the same heatwave there. For a holiday is nothing better. Chimon writes also?'

'He squeezed a couple of words in at the bottom.'

'To tell you the truth,' said Rivka Rochel with a smile, 'it was by me a little wonder that you let her go away for a whole week with a young man.'

'What a terrible woman you are! You know it is not with him alone but with twenty-three more young people!'

'I didn't mean something bad. And in any case he is as good as her choosen already,' her bridegroom, 'so you have nothing to worry.'

Ada, who'd been sleeping badly since Miriam left, put down her crochet.

'I have nothing to worry, but he is not her choosen. They are no more than good friends.'

'Who do you think you are fooling?' Rivka Rochel drew up her brows challengingly. 'When you expect him here she does not stir from the spot! And in the Club they always stick together, everyone says so.'

'Ai, Rivka Rocheleh,' Ada wagged a forefinger. 'Gossiping again?'

'You mean to tell me you have not noticed nothing special?'

'What is to notice? You have yourself seen how it is when he comes. They talk, they read, or she translates for him something, or they go with the Youth Circle somewhere.'

'Yes, your Miriam does not mind to go about in a crowd. It is not for my Sarah. The third boy she goes with already, but alone. Hot blood she has,' exploding into a laugh, 'like her mother! But she does not let them go too far, she told me when I asked her. Your Mirry would let?'

Ada shook her head. 'I do not ask such questions.'

'You! You haven't got no curiosity. Me, I want to know everything.'

'This I know well.'

'Even from Abram I want to know everything.'

Ada pressed her lips together and crocheted in silence.

'You know what I asked him the other day? If he still has relations with Yenta.'

'It was very wrong of you,' said Ada with anger. 'It is none of your business.'

'Just what he answered me! And I so wanted to know! Noo, my potatoes are ready to boil. I bring you back the saucepan tomorrow.'

'No hurry.'

Whether I noticed nothing special. Am I blind? But it is not possible to tell something private to that broadcasting company, as Jacob calls her. A changed girl she is, he cannot take his eyes from her, by him is no greater beauty in all London. And clears the table and washes away a few things without telling. About time, a girl nearly eighteen, at her age a whole household leaned on me. But how I will live through the next days I do not know. I should only see her back home with the period she should have by then. Is it not remarkable that the father, who worries so on the smallest detail, does not think of such things? Better so or he would drive me mad. Only to grumble he knows, this is not good, that is not good. Now the beloved daughter is away he notices more the son, only to complain that he plays around

too much and is interested only in sport. What does he expect, probably compares himself at that age, sitting in cheder day and night, studying Torah. Much good it did him. Health it didn't bring him.

That evening Philip completed a model aeroplane in cardboard.

'Look, Mum.' It sailed across the room before falling.

'Ooh va va! By yourself you have made it, Philipel?'

'Well, it was marked out on the model, see?'

'Just the same it is good.'

'What for is it good?' said Jacob critically, stabbing between his teeth with a toothpick. 'What use has it? Better if you sometimes looked into a book like the sister.'

She said very low, tell him it is nice, tell him he made it well, but he brushed his hand across the tablecloth and said nothing, while Philip shoved the model under the sofa with his foot and flung himself on his back playing his mouth-organ loudly, till they protested and he made it quieter.

'You do not do right,' she said later. 'When a child makes something one should encourage him, useful or not useful.'

'A child?—a boy in his tenth year?'

'He only just became nine. And do not hold the sister forward as example, that is altogether another type. Did you like when she was always buried in a book and we had to beg on our knees for a little help?'

'Ach, leave me alone already.'

She left it. Always the problem, how far to go without upsetting him too much. But the next evening, going down to the cellar to mend a chair, he called Philip to help him and the boy sprang to his feet. So it goes. One must try, without trying is nothing achieved.

In Miriam's absence she was training Philip to watch through the little window after tea, but whereas the girl had sat with her nose in a book, the boy slipped away altogether; coming down from making order in the wardrobe she found him drawing on the floor.

'And the shop door wide open,' she scolded. 'What is with you? someone could easy have pinched something!'

'Doesn't matter,' he said without looking up. 'Plenty more stuff, isn't there?'

Just like Jacob, one could not be sure if he was serious. Jacob had come home that afternoon with a pair of new boots.

'So big?' she said. 'Even bigger than the last pair! and those were a size bigger than before!'

'Yes, my feet must be growing.'

'Look at them, you will swim away in them.'

'If only I could.'

'Let me see you try them on.'

'No need. I had to take this size, Ada, not my feet but a toe-nail is growing.'

'A toe-nail one can cut off.'

'Not this one.' He sat down and bared the foot.

'Oi vei's meer—is this how you go about? A whole horn you have there!'

'Perhaps I'm turning into a devil?'

'No wonder there is a hole in that place in every sock. It hurts you?'

'Not if it isn't pressed too hard.'

'Noo, tonight I will see what can be done. But you should not dare to wear the new boots, maybe you can change them for a few sizes smaller.'

'What, are you a doctor now?'

She made him soak the foot in hot water while he sat on the sofa reading after supper, then gingerly tried a nail file on it, and when it made no impression she got him to sharpen his open razor on the leather strop and shaved off a tiny flake at a time, working till past midnight on her knees, and the same three nights running till the nail was as good as flat again and she sat back on her heels bright eyed and triumphant.

'And what you say now, apikoiress meiner?' My non-believer?

He laid aside the newspaper. 'What I say? That Moses who got water from the rock was not such a miracle maker as you, my wife,' he fondled her, 'who makes a rock to disappear with water.'

'And with a rod, don't forget.' She held up the razor.

It helped to push the time away till the expected knock on Sunday night sent her hurrying to the door. There they

were, with those packs on their backs. She flung up her hands.

'So black you are!' And knew, from the intensity of Miriam's kiss she knew, what the words would be that rushed from her when they dropped their rucksacks on the kitchen floor.

'Mummy, Daddy, we've got something to tell you, Simon and me, we found out that—we love each other and—we are choosen-kalleh!' Betrothed. She took Simon's hand.

Ada dropped onto a chair. 'Already?' she said faintly, and started those violent hiccups.

Jacob's colour flared in his clear skin; then the musical murmur rippled his moustache. He shook Simon's arm.

'What happened, Chimon?—you got inspired by the blue sky and the sunshine?'

Simon's face split into the great smile that showed all his teeth with the front ones jutting out. He put an arm round Miriam's shoulders and hugged her.

Ada stood up, arms raised as if in blessing. 'As s'iz azoi, kinder, zol zein mit mazel.' As it's so, children, may it be with luck.

'Come here, little daughter,' said Jacob shakily, and there was a fresh round of kissing, and a glass of whisky poured for all except Ada, who drank the toast in bicarbonate of soda, and they all spoke at once except Simon, who fell silent, and apart from a few words over the meal his silence deepened as he sat revolving a muscular red-brown knee, unresponsive to Miriam's questioning glances, till it was time for him to leave and they went through the dark shop to say goodnight at the door, which took time.

'Noo, Jacob,' said Ada.

'Noo, Ada,' said Jacob.

'What you say to this?'

'What is there to say?'

'You are glad, you are sorry, say a word!'

'Our little girl, Ada!' He shook his head. 'I can't believe it. You do not think her too young?'

'I was not older when we became choosen-kalleh, but this you don't remember! Never mind, more important is, what you think of Chimon for a husband?'

'A decent enough young man, though he is a Bolshevik. I have nothing against him. And you?'

'I have great respect for him.'

He drummed on the table. 'I had the impression you liked more the one next door.'

'Yes I did, and in a way I still do. Er iz mehr tsugebunden, mehr tsulozlech,'—he is more affectionate, more approachable. 'But Chimon is deeper, more solid. The pity is only that leizen leizt er a krenk,'—he doesn't make a living. 'Maybe ...'

The street door was being closed, the bolts being slid, the rusty key grated in the lock and they turned to look at their daughter.

'Look look, Ada, a piece of the sun has fallen out of the sky!'

'Yes, she looks wonderful. But Meerkeleh, only once in life we take such a step. Are you sure?'

'I'm sure, I'm sure, I never was surer.' She twirled on one foot. 'And I'm so happy I could die.'

'But what was with Chimon, that he was so quiet?'

'He didn't want me to say anything yet, he wanted to wait—but I'd have burst. He's afraid you'll think I'm too young and he's worried because he's only working part time.'

Ada nodded. 'A responsible person.'

'But I'm working full time. Together we could manage.'

'You are a child still. How long can a home be run on a wife's earnings?'

'We're not going in for a baby right away!'

'It can happen! It is something one should be prepared for. And with two millions unemployed you cannot be sure of your job either.'

'So? You're going to find me a rich husband?'

'What about a little shop—Daddy and I would help towards it?'

Miriam jumped as if scalded. 'A shop? Over my dead body! Simon and me in a shop? I'd rather starve.'

'Only that one who has never starved can speak of it so light. What say you, Jacob?'

He stretched himself, yawning. 'I say that tomorrow is

another day. Must we settle everything on one evening? It is nearly time to get up. You are coming?'

He brushed his teeth, scrubbed his hands, put an inch of cold water in the po as usual, and went to bed. Mother and daughter cleared the table and washed up, and Miriam, uncommonly chatty and confiding, was telling her, as if she didn't know, that it wasn't really sudden, she'd been in love with him for more than a year, and he's so marvellous, Mummy.

'Yesterday morning I had to stay in bed because of awful pains you know what from ...' Now I can breathe again, thought Ada, heaving a great sigh to prove it. 'The cottages all the girls were staying in were half a mile from the boys' camp, and when I sent him a note that I wasn't well he came rushing to see me with a bunch of flowers he'd picked on the way, but what do you think?' she giggled. 'The landlady wouldn't let him come up till he agreed to leave the bedroom door wide open, and she stood at the bottom of the stairs listening in!'

Ada said with her half-smile, 'One does not need a bedroom to make a baby in.'

'Anyway, it was none of her business. Oh Mummy, you look so nice tonight, with your cheeks so pink. I hope I look as young as you when I'm your age.'

Compliments from the daughter, noo noo!

Miriam told Philip the next morning that Simon was to be his brother-in-law, and a momentary radiance flickered across his face.

'Jolly good.'

'Siz jolly and siz goot,' she said in her mother's voice, and he laughed and permitted her to kiss him, then she went to work and he to school and Jacob to market, and Rivka Rochel looked in and Ada told her, and she dropped her heavy shopping bag with a thump.

'What did I told you? And you made nothing from it!'

'You were a prophet,' said Ada demurely.

'Zol zein mit glick,' said Rivka Rochel, kissing her; let it be with joy. 'I wish you and them only of the best.'

'Miertz' hashem by Saraleh,' said Ada—please God by little Sarah. English deserted them in moments like this.

'Oomein,' said Rivka Rochel—amen. 'If only Sarah and Jack would do the same, we could make a double wedding! But my daughter does not like to be one among many.'

And by this she must mean that my daughter does like it.

She and Jacob were both serving when Miriam came home, and could exchange only specially bright hellos with her as she went in to the kitchen. Philip asked her, gazing skyward:

'Simon gonna live here now?'

'Oh no, there's hardly room for us here.'

'You gonna go and live with him then?'

'He's got even less space! No, we must get a place of our own when we've saved up. Hey look at your face and hands, go and get washed, Simon's coming to supper, tra-la-la-la-la-la-la-la!'

'Jolly good,' he said soberly.

'Siz jolly ...'

'And siz goot,' he finished with his flickering smile.

Jack came across the yard and stood by the open back door.

'Huh! Some colour you got on you! Nice holiday?'

'Yes ...' Her heart quickened. She said jerkily, 'A wonderful holiday ... Jack, Simon and me—we are choosen-kalleh. Wish me mazeltov.'

'Mazeltov,' he said slowly, not offering to kiss her, not looking surprised or pleased or anything, just dropping his eyelids. Her mother bustled in.

'You heard our news, Yankeleh?' She opened her arms and he let go the door-knob to put his arms round her and lean his head on hers. 'Stay, stay and eat with us, Yankeleh. Chimon will be here in a minute, and have I made a marvellous supper!'

No no no, he couldn't even wait for a drink; another time, Meemeshee, and he went out through the shop, pausing only to shake hands with her father. So now as always he puzzled and hurt her.

But Simon's appearance, ruddy and beaming, blotted everything out, he filled her sky; and seeing him in a shirt and tie and long trousers made it all real, what had happened, not a fantasy dreamed up among the sand dunes in the sun after

that year of longing, confusion and despair. As soon as they were all round the table he and Dad were arguing once more about that onslaught by the Arabs on the Jews in Palestine, killing more than a hundred and wounding three times as many. It was the first anniversary of what Dad still called a pogrom and Simon still called a revolt. It was part of the struggle against imperialism, he said; neither of them had changed their views in the meantime. And Mum said they should better eat than talk as the food would get cold but the argument wouldn't. So everything was normal except that her parents' attitude to her had subtly changed as if she'd become an adult overnight, and she and Simon were gripping hands under the cloth and she could hardly eat for happiness.

After the meal Mum said they weren't to wash up, what! on such an occasion? but go better round to Black Bull Lane and tell them what has happened, and when Miriam groaned she said it would not be nice they should hear it first from others, and Jacob said that was certainly too late already, seeing that the Broadcasting Station had known in the morning, but Simon said why not, let's get it over, so they went arm-in-arm not looking where they were going, Simon beaming his great smile down on her. Look everybody, this is my man, I'm his woman, on these real pavements, in this real street.

They found the family still at supper in their shop-parlour, below shelves stacked with goods to the ceiling, and it was clear from their surprised greeting that Rivka Rochel hadn't managed to get round there yet. The two elder boys had married earlier that year and moved away, leaving gaps at the big table; the two younger were eating with books propped before them. Sammy, taller and slimmer at seventeen than in that other life when they were children together and she was crazy about him, glanced up briefly from his book to say hello, but his older brother politely stopped reading. Auntie Chaya urged them to eat with them, look, there is plenty for us all, and more in the kitchen, and was upset when they said only tea please. While Uncle Mortchêh questioned Simon about the workshop, was it slack or was it busy, and throwing in a quotation or two from the Talmud,

she was racking her brains how to tell them. Couldn't possibly use Yiddish words in front of her cousins, and didn't like to say engaged, so bourgeois and conventional, oh help, they'd all fallen silent, and when her aunt brought the tea she blurted out,

'You all know Simon—we've been friends a long time and —and—well, we're going to be together always!' she finished with a flaming face.

The boys exchanged looks of amusement and under their breath a few words in French; Mortcheh's eyebrows arched steeply, the corners of his separated moustache went down, and Chaya said what, what? looking mystified, so she had to say engaged after all. Her aunt embraced her, shedding tears, her uncle presented his prickly cheek for kissing, ugh, and the cousins shook hands with her and with Simon, the elder saying, 'Well, congrats and all that,' and the younger, 'Same here,' and Uncle Mortcheh said, 'Noo, Chaya, men darf shtelln a gleizeleh mashkeh,' serve a drink, and soon after that, seeing Simon grow awkward and moody she made an excuse for them to leave, Auntie Chaya wringing her hands all the way to the door, oi vei iz meer, you haven't had a bite to eat.

Simon said morosely, 'They think I'm not good enough for you, I suppose, because I'm only a worker and haven't got no education.'

'Haven't *any* education,' she said automatically, and he dropped her hand and turned his head away. He might just as well have stabbed her in the heart.

'What's wrong? You always wanted me to correct your English in your letters, and anyway who cares what they think, they're awful snobs, I mean my cousins, not the old people, they look down on me as well . . .' And his face being still averted she stopped and implored:

'Simon, are you angry with me?'

He turned and seized her hand. 'Angry with you, my beloved, how can I be angry with you when I so very much love you?' He pulled her impetuously across the High Street almost under the feet of a horse and cart into the little park beside the church where he started kissing her like mad by the old oak tree that spread its branches over the tombstones,

they only stopped to get more breath and start again. The lamp-lighter was going round turning on the gas lamps with his pole, and standing in the light of one she said keep your eyes open when you kiss me, I want to see them, and he said all right, but however hard he tried he couldn't, passion closed them against his will.

'You've bewitched me,' he said, 'I haven't thought nothing about the class struggle these last many days,' and he said lovely things like her eyes were so deep he could drown in them, and her lips were like rose-petals; and she said she loved his high cheekbones and his big mouth that swallowed her up, and he said you've got grik prests, or that was what it sounded like, he had to repeat it three times, which embarrassed him, before she understood he meant Grecian breasts, which embarrassed her; and he wished he had long and beautiful hands to caress her with and she said she liked them as they were, which was a downright lie may God forgive me, and that the squareness suited the rest of him, which was true. And she whispered that she loved the great hard muscles at the back of his thighs and he started kissing her more savagely, his warm hands under her blouse sending delicious rivulets of fire radiating out all over her skin, and when people approached on the path it was terrible to separate, like tearing two magnets asunder.

They swore they'd love each other for ever and ever, for how could it be otherwise, how could this force that rocked them ever grow weaker, but if, but if, but if it should, they must tell each other at once and not live together without love like Rivka Rochel and Yossel did, and possibly the Mitzniks. And then he said he'd never, never be angry with her again in the whole of his life, and they went and sat down on a bench with their arms round each other's waists.

'We was kidding ourselves with that platonic love business, wasn't we?' She nodded, blushing with the knowledge that it never was platonic on her side, not since that moment at the Literary Trial when he said I am a man, with a man's desires; now she could confess it. And he said he'd never in his life forget the moment three days ago when they stood on that hilltop above the camp and she said do you mean you love me like a man?

Their love already had its history and its geography, in two separate parts that were coming together like two streams joining to form a great river.

'Remember when I was on holiday with Dad and you came for those two days?'

'Do I remember!'

'When we were lying in that field you'll never guess what I was thinking? That our two bodies could make another one, as if we were God,' she said vibrantly, 'and just then you bent over and kissed my *forehead*—oh why didn't you kiss my mouth?'

'I was holding myself back with all my strength, because you was so young.'

'And now I'm four months older it's OK?'

He grinned. 'I'll sure be arrested for baby-snatching, and if so my defence would be that you cast a spell over me, you little witch.' His w's still v's; little vitch. He started singing very low: *Hey, Tsigeleh!* and her veins sang it with him.

'Hey, little goat!
Come thou swiftly unto me,
A fine song am I about to sing to you just now.
With a shepherd lad this little song will begin,
And a maiden that cast her spell over him.
Hey, little goat!
Hark what later there transpired ...'

A gang of boys came charging up the path throwing small stones at one another, and passing them one yelled and the others joined in,

'Yah! Dirty Yids!'

'Bleeden Jews!'

'Fuckin Yids!' And a stone rattled against the bench. In a flash Simon was on his feet with the stone in his hands, and he flung it with fury after them as they ran hooting through the market exit. And now, the place having lost its charm for them, they set off silently for home in the other direction, her throat swelling with the grief she'd first felt in Warsaw when the bearded old Jew was attacked by a young hooligan; and often since then, in the shop, in the street.

'Oh Simon, will it always be like this, must they hate us

everywhere, in Poland, in Germany, in Palestine ...' The tears welled up and he stopped her at the gate to kiss them away and stroke her hair.

'Why, my darling, you mustn't take it so serious.'

She gulped. 'It's only because I was feeling so terribly happy when they barged in.'

'They was just a bunch of ignoramuses, they don't know no better. We must fight them with education. In Russia is a law, you mustn't insult another race, but here they don't do nothing against it, it suits them that the Jews are blamed for everything, it distracts the people from the real enemy, the capitalists who exploit them.'

As they walked on he said sombrely, 'You know what you taking on, me and my politics? What will be if they send me to prison?'

'I'd wait for you, darling, oh I'd wait for you a lifetime!'

She longed for a chance to prove her steadfastness. 'But it could happen to me as well,' thinking of Uncle Eli's heroine in *When the Mute Shall Speak*; and imagined herself making impassioned speeches to a lean and hungry multitude from the plinth in Trafalgar Square, or at the docks, perhaps. Dressed in red she saw herself, her dark hair streaming in the wind, carrying on fearlessly though the police were coming ... Reaching the doorstep she suddenly turned to him.

'But before anything rotten happens to either of us, I want to have a child, Simon.'

'You, you, you,' he said helplessly, and squeezed her breathless between the shop window and the door, where Draper & Haberdasher was painted on the brickwork. Jacob had painted out the former owner's name and refused to put his own in, preferring to be anonymous, which Ada said was bad for business. After nine years they still argued about it sometimes.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Ada told Simon he should feel himself free to come to supper whenever he liked, but the two young people were so taken up with their Youth Section and their evening classes and their committees on this and that,—Gott gerechter, her head swam hearing all they were doing—that when they stayed in a whole evening it was an occasion. But if he saw Miriam home he came in for a late cup of tea with them, and eventually she and Jacob had to go to bed and leave them there. She forced her eyes to stay open so that if the talking stopped and the silence lasted she could call down Miriam! S'vert shpet—it's getting late—or Miriam! You won't be able to get up in the morning, hoping thus to prevent matters going too far with them. After a time they moved out to the shop and stood in the open doorway who knows how long, for at that stage she sometimes allowed herself to drift off, there being no sofa in the shop.

And now perhaps you will interest yourself a bit more in the cooking, she said, and Miriam reluctantly supposed so. She was explaining to her how to make two dinners at once, with tomorrow's looking quite different from today's, when Chimon called her to read this article about China and she lost her.

She said laughingly, 'Will you like it, Chimon, if you come home and she gives you, instead dinner, an article on China?'

'So long there is something to chew,' he smiled, 'I won't mind.'

'Noo, noo,' she nodded, 'we'll see. We'll soon see if you won't expect a bit more at the end of a hard day's work than just something to chew.'

I should live to see the time when he has got a hard day's work. Still on short-time, and lucky to have that seeing that Yossel, who'd got him the job in the first place, lost his own

and couldn't get another though he wore a pair of shoes out looking. He went to pieces. Rivka Rochel came in to say hotly that she'd sooner he smashed plates on the floor than sat around snivelling all day saying what's to become of my poor wife and child, nebich. What he was really crying about, she said, was that instead of stuffing money into the bank to get buried there for ever he had to take some out every week, which to him was worse than pulling his own teeth out one by one without anaesthetic.

Outside the shop the road was being mended, and a Jewish customer came in to say:

'There's a dark young man in that hole in the road who looks to me like a Yiddisher feller.'

Ada went to the door. 'I think you are right.'

'Fancy a Jew lowering himself to such a dirty work,' said the woman. 'A disgrace, if he went round the Yiddisher shops and houses everyone would be glad to give him a sixpence.'

She quite forgot the customer was always right. 'You should excuse me, but I must tell you you are a big fool,' she said sharply. 'By me is a bigger disgrace if a healthy young man goes begging!'

She told Mortcheh the story when he came round that night. He gazed impassively into the inverted bowler between his knees.

'I wish I'd made my sons for workers, instead to waste so many years getting a high education. A worker can any time turn his hand to something that earns him a few shillings for bread, but a college boy ...' He shrugged. Yitschok—George, that is—had lost his job, and though his wife still had hers, how far did that take them, such a grand flat they'd taken on, with a bathroom noch. Twenty-five heavy shillings a week it cost them, and a baby on the way.

The knots of men on the street corners were growing, so were the queues at the Labour Exchanges, and outside the offices of the Tailor and Garment Workers Union the lines wound round the corner into Whitechapel. The stories in the shop and in the papers! said Ada, they could make one's gall overflow. Whole families supported by one wage-earning child, half-grown youngsters leaving home to look for work elsewhere, people left with hardly a chair to sit on before

relief was granted, and look at this, she said, a young Jewish couple here in the East End, madly in love and in the best of health, killed themselves in a suicide pact because there was no work for them and no hope; she a dressmaker and he a tailor. She looked up and said wonderingly:

'Who would believe it would come to this in England, people with a trade in their hands walking about idle?'

'At least there is no unemployment among postmen,' said Jacob. 'There can't be. This house by itself keeps them busy.'

Letters were flying between the old country and the new, the parents at both ends of Europe congratulating each other that their children had chosen landsleit—my father sure thought, said Simon, that I left home on purpose to marry a shikseh—and all his sisters down to the eight-year-old youngest sent individual mazeltovs, and both brothers, even the one whose trousers he'd stolen to leave home in. Jacob's sister Frimeh wrote, and Ada's brother Judah, and Rachel of course, with the latest photos of her lovely daughters and one of herself with bare shoulders—at forty! exclaimed Ada. Eli sent three words, she said, when in fact it was a couple of dozen, and after an interval whose length she wondered at, Shoshanna wrote at last to reveal what Judah had concealed. Miriam came down one morning to find her mother with eyes so swollen she could barely see.

'You have no more a Booba,' she said huskily. 'And I had dreamed to bring her over for your wedding, to give her a little happiness before the end. Too long I waited, I should long ago have done it.'

And she had thought her grandmother would always be there, tucked safely into the Polish past, knitting a never-ending stocking on four steel needles and weeping into the candles every Friday night for ever. When she took her sorrow to Simon he was surprised.

'An old lady of sixty-three, darling! She'd come to the end of her life.'

'But ... but ... I loved her!'

'You can't expect people to live for ever just because you love them.'

No, she didn't expect it but she wanted it, that was just what she very fiercely wanted, that nobody belonging to her

should ever die. Hadn't she suffered enough from death already? And she was disappointed that he didn't grieve with her over Boobenyu, who could so easily have been at their wedding.

But the wedding was further off than ever. When the unemployment figures soared to two-and-a-half million Miriam was one of them. The debt-collecting department of her hire-purchase firm had closed down, its agents having written from all over the country that you can't get blood from a stone. The debts were being sent to a firm that specialised in making stones yield blood. She came home white and shaken.

'Do not take it so to heart, my child. You have a home. We can still afford to keep you.'

'But we're supposed to be saving up to get married.'

'So you will work in the shop, we will pay you, and I will show you how to make a marvellous soup out of nothing! See how good it is to have a shop? One can always live on it for a while when things are bad.'

So there she was, back in the stupid shop. She didn't mind so much when once in a while there was something of good quality or something pretty to get enthusiastic about, but she couldn't praise the ugly shoddy stuff, couldn't find it in her to persuade a hesitant customer, as she was supposed to do, to buy something she herself hated the sight of. The best she could do was to murmur bleakly, it's so cheap! In the yawning spaces between customers she answered adverts for shorthand typists. At every interview twenty or thirty girls eyed each other in the waiting room; once nearly fifty spilled out of two lifts in a great building, all after the same job, and an elegant woman came out to say that only those with good French and German need stay, emptying the place like magic but for three. She joined the queue at the Labour Exchange and was sent after local jobs that were filled before she got there. A factory girl in front of her at the counter one morning, offered domestic service, said loudly:

'I'm not doing no piss-pot carrying and be a slave to a missus for five lousy bob a week.' She'd probably have to in the end, the dole wasn't handed out for ever. Miriam, using hers for fares and stamps and pocket money, was uncom-

fortably aware that others had to live on it.

Once she came home so tired and dispirited that Ada, haunted by the suicide story, produced a Post Office book. Every penny Miriam had given her since the day she started work was there; a hundred and thirty pounds. Their wedding present. It would furnish two rooms and a kitchen and not with rubbish either—you will let Abram make your furniture, yes?

'Mummy!' She was dazed. And not quite sure if she was glad or sorry, it made nonsense of her work, she told Simon later, when she thought it was earning her keep, and he said she shouldn't be silly, think what a pleasure it gives them, he was only sorry he couldn't contribute nothing himself. With Passover approaching he got a Sunday morning job in the Mile End Road decanting wine from barrels into bottles and came to dinner every week, very gay, bringing with him on the last Sunday a few bottles for them.

'What a marvellous Seder night we shall have on Friday,' said Ada, 'with you at our table for the first time, Chimon.'

The young couple looked at each other.

'We can't come,' said Miriam. 'Saklatvala, the MP, is speaking on Zionism and the future of Palestine. We can't possibly miss it. Well really, Mum, don't look like that! It's not as if you were religious or anything. We'll come the second night, it's just as good.'

'You should know by now as good as me, it is not possible to make a Seder night here on a Saturday, open till nine and busier than usual, if we are lucky, for *zeyer* Yomtov,' for *their* holiday. 'By the time we close we are ready to fall into bed, not to start a feast. And how can we ask the Mitzniks so late? No, it is no good.'

'Then let us have a little supper just for the family on Saturday,' said Simon, 'nothing special. With wine anything will be a feast.' He took her hand. 'Don't upset yourself, Meemeshee. It isn't worth.'

She was getting fonder of him. Whenever he was there he was ready to help, one need never ask him twice, on his feet straight away to give a pull or a push or put something to rights with such an energy, a pleasure to see it; at Christmas it had made all the difference to Jacob, a pair of strong

young arms to put up the stall and push it home for him at night. And with Jacob's good example he took to washing up or wiping up, not so perfect as Jacob but a hundred times quicker, and ready to do what Jacob wasn't, to help with preparing a meal. Once he washed the lettuce for a salad and when it was served her teeth grated on sand. She said nothing, but Miriam cried out:

'Eugh ... a wriggly worm on my lettuce!' And laughed.

The young man opened a pair of eyes such as Ada had never seen on him before. 'What you mean?' he shouted. 'Are you saying I didn't wash it?'

'Woof-woof,' barked Philip. 'Woof-woof!'

Ada frowned at him fiercely, shaking her head, and taking the lettuce leaf with its resident from Miriam's plate, she said lightly, 'Ai, one tiny worm, it is not worth a fuss.'

Jacob laid aside his fork and stopped eating. Chimon went on with the meal looking as if he'd been hung, Miriam as if shot, and she alone, apparently deaf and blind, chattered on till the young pair got up at the end, saying they were going for a walk.

Jacob screwed up his eyes, turned down the corners of his mouth and swayed his head. 'Azoi, is goor shlecht,' he said with slow intensity—so, it is very bad. 'To such an oisvoorf we give our only daughter?'—To such an outcast, a rotter?

'Ach, Jacob, you exaggerate! One fault does not make a man an oisvoorf. Are you perfect? Am I? And your precious daughter? If she had any sense she would have bitten her tongue, not to make criticism in front of the whole table.'

'But so to tear oneself like a dog from a chain over a nothing? Feh! No wonder Philip barked. He was right.'

He stood cracking his fingers, and she spent the next hour trying to smooth the matter over, persuading him, though she had also been shocked by the outburst, that it wasn't the worst crime in the world.

They looked normal enough when they came back, and she had to call down more often than usual before she heard the street door close and her daughter's feet on the stairs. The church clock struck one. Two miles he'd have to walk home, and tomorrow, up again at seven for the workshop. The sooner they got married the better but—on thirty or so

shillings a week? Rent alone would swallow half of them. She tossed about, doing sums in her head. And a shop they still wouldn't hear of.

'Your *Daily Worker* is always angry,' Jacob was looking at a few copies Simon had brought in.

'It has plenty to be angry about,' said Simon.

'Capitalist Offensive Gathers Strength!' Jacob read out. 'Imperialist Bandits Meet Today!' He threw back his head and laughed aloud, enjoying the insult to the great and powerful. 'Banditten, they're right. Bosses Want a British Hitler! This I doubt.'

'Why the doubt? German capitalism turns to Hitler to save itself, why not the English also? Capitalism creates unemployment, and unemployment can lead to Fascism here as well as there. To avoid it we must get rid of Capitalism,' said Simon. 'It's as simple as that. Russia has shown the way.'

Ada said with her ironic half-smile, 'You believe in Russia, Chimon, like a pious Jew believes in God.'

'No Meemeshee, there's no evidence for a God, but plenty of evidence that Socialism can solve the problems what we bang our heads against everywhere. In that enormous land only fifty thousand out of work, imagine. And look what they do for the Jews, could we dream of it under the Tsar? A Yiddish Theatre in Moscow, so good that Goyim go to see it. Yiddish schools, Yiddish newspapers and journals. And a colony in Birobijan where Jews can become productive workers, instead luft-mentshen,' instead of plucking a living from thin air.

'The *Tseit* says Birobijan is shoin in drerd,' said Jacob; it has already failed.

'Morris Myer can go hang himself. He just repeats the same lies as the capitalist press.'

'And you believe what the *Daily Worker* says,' said Ada. 'How is it possible for little people like us to know the truth?'

'We must use our own heads. Ever since 1917 the Capitalists have been afeared that their people will do the same as the Russians, so they tell lies about it. How many times did Lenin die before he died? And now it is Stalin who is

three times a week assassinated, and the Sovieten Farband collapses three times a year. It collapses and collapses and gets stronger all the time. A child can see it is lies.'

'Noo noo,' said Ada.

From time to time they laid down the burden of the world's cares and queued for the cinema and theatre. For sixpence in the gallery at the Globe they saw Elmer Rice's *Street Scene*, a tragedy of working-class life in America that drew praise from the *Jewish Chronicle*, though the playwright was a Red, for its sympathetic portrayal of an old Jewish Communist. At the Savoy there was standing room only to hear a big black man whose mighty black voice rose from the bowels of the earth to shake the heavens with his singing. He sang the sorrows of his people and of theirs, and they gripped hands very hard throughout *Yisgadal*, the latest news of attacks on German Jews lending it a special poignancy.

Good day to thee, Lord God Almighty!
I, Levi Isaac, son of Sarah from Berditchev,
Here am I before thee,
With a grave and earnest plea from this my people:
What hast thou done to this thy people?
Why hast thou so oppressed this thy people?
... O God on high!
From my place I will not move,
I will not move from my place,
And an end let there be,
To all the sorrow and suffering,
Yisgadal ve Yiskadash shemei rabbo.

When Simon told her the last line meant magnified and hallowed be his name, she saw, instead of Paul Robeson on the stage, a tall Jew wrapped in his prayer-shawl, gaunt and bearded, alone against an empty sky, daring to defy the God he venerated.

Now and then they went out with Rose, she of the perfect profile, and Monty, the fat and cheerful young man she'd met at a meeting. One day Rose and Monty had found themselves canvassing the same street with copies of *Russia Today*,

and he asked her to marry him, saying I'll give you to the end of the street to think it over but I won't take no for an answer. Monty had a mass of black hair, a massive blue chin, and soft hands that curled at the tips. He worked for his father, a rich wholesaler who underpaid him, he said, so he helped himself from the till to even things up and didn't even feel guilty about it. He insisted on paying for better seats than they could have dreamed of, and for tea and chocolate éclairs afterwards at Lyons Corner House. He helped Rose on and off with her coat, pulled out her chair, opened and closed doors for her. Simon said it was a bourgeois attitude to women, a polite disguise for regarding them as inferior; if the sexes were equal, why treat each other differently?—an argument Miriam found entirely reasonable, while wishing that Simon would none the less do as Monty did.

When the girls gazed too long at shop-windows on the way, the men stopped at a rubber goods store, pointing out trusses and syringes to each other excitedly and exclaiming ooh! ah! look, isn't it beautiful, no I like that one over there much better, and the girls fled. Rose stopped again.

'See, Mirry, that's the coloured bathroom I want after the revolution—remember?' She still squashed her lips together to hide the crooked tooth when she smiled.

Over the months Monty's capitalist father paid for them to see the whole series of Soviet films that had all the critics raving: *The End of St Petersburg* and *The General Line*, *Earth* and *Mother*. When they went for tea after *Mother*, Miriam said that the film was better than the book.

Simon thrust his chin out. 'Why is it better?'

'I don't know . . . because it's more alive, I think.'

'Of course, it's a picture, and you can see the actors.'

'No, that isn't the reason.' She bit her lip; what was the reason? 'In a good book the people come alive as you read, you can imagine them without seeing them, but in *Mother* they only came to life in the film, with good actors to make them seem real. In the book they were boring.'

'Gorky? Boring?'

She saw the whites of his eyes over the irises, and sweat broke out between her shoulder-blades. Oh Lord, she was always saying the wrong thing.

'Only in *Mother*,' she said hastily. '*My Childhood* was wonderful.'

It didn't help. They had to carry the conversation without him, and after they'd separated from the others he was still silent, his head turned away from her all down Stepney Green and along the High Street till at the corner of Wildwood Place he suddenly took her in his arms and groaned.

'Oh my darling, I can't bear it when you're miserable. It's my accursed temper, you shouldn't take no notice of me, or kick me hard next time!'

'Oh Simon!' The relief when he came back to her, when he came back.

Going out as a foursome was fun, but she'd had to share him so long with others, and still did, that to have him to herself was heaven. To think he'd picked her out, her! from all those girls at the Club who were prettier or cleverer or livelier than she was. They still flocked round him and she let them, she stood aside, he had a job to do, she wouldn't hamper him or put claims to him or interrupt his former friendships. She could afford to be generous; she'd carried off the prize. And they were generous too, open-hearted in their congratulations, except for Jack, who kept his distance still, Simon said he'd ask him why one day, and Bertha, who waved her jealousy like a banner for all to read, acting offended with Simon and ignoring her pointedly. Poor old thing, had she really believed she stood a chance?

During the past year those she'd most loved, most wanted as friends, had scattered to America, South Africa, and Palestine. Little Esther with her shouting gaiety had gone, and calmly logical Alan, and recently Ella, everyone's affectionate sister; when they saw her off she felt bereaved. Sometimes she frightened herself, deliberately imagining Simon had gone also, to heighten the joy of knowing he hadn't. He was with her, he was hers. Simon. She still couldn't believe it.

They went alone to see *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and couldn't touch each other during the film and couldn't speak on coming out. Seeing a small Lyons they nodded dumbly and went in, finding a table to themselves. A verse was running in her head, she couldn't place it.

O German mother, dreaming by the fire,
While you are knitting socks to send your son,
His face is trodden deeper in the mud ...

and starting to recite it to Simon she broke down. He came round the table to put an arm about her.

'Don't, little Mirry, don't.'

She struggled for control. 'All those meetings and lectures and demos, what's the good of them, it's going to happen all over again.'

'We must keep on making people conscious of the danger, convince them to join the fight against it. Films like that help us, and books like Barbusse's *Under Fire*. We are not alone! All over the world people hate war and do what they can against it, each in his own way. Who wants war? Only those who make a profit from it.'

'I wish I could do something more than we're doing.'

'You mustn't take it so personal. We can't be martyrs, we must live as normal as we can.' And suddenly that tender smile full of teeth was beaming down at her.

'Darling Miriam, it's so good that you're with me in the movement. I was always afeared I'd get a wife who wouldn't let me go to meetings.'

She blew her nose, laughing. As if he'd marry anyone like that, or take any notice of them if he did.

They ran a social at the Club in aid of the International Relief Committee who collected funds for families of political prisoners and for unofficial strikers, and were planning well ahead to have a van in Hyde Park dispensing free tea and sandwiches to the National Hunger Marchers the day they came to London. They knew the chairman Madge Steel who'd come in person to make the appeal, they'd met her several times before. She was a fair and dumpy Yorkshirewoman in a black leather jacket that strained at its buttons. Her colourless, double-chinned face was enlivened by a pair of very shrewd eyes, and from the small mouth issued a slow, surprisingly deep voice that parted ten-shilling notes from their owners before they knew it had happened.

'I haven't come to beg,' she said. 'I've come to give you the

chance of helping your fellow-workers, people like you, who'd empty their pockets to help *you* if they could. To those here who are also out of work, I say that the Hunger Marchers are not only marching for themselves, they are marching for you, for everyone sick and tired of existing on the dole, for the right to work, for a future worth living ... (Miriam, there's a ten-bob note waving at the back). If anyone's left their cheque book at home,' roars of laughter, 'I'll acept an IOU but don't forget your name and address on the back so that I can chase you for it afterwards. No more notes? O.K., we'll take half-crowns.' And so it went till she'd satisfied herself that the last penny had been spirited out of the last pocket and people were grumbling cheerfully that they'd have to walk home.

Up in the Bar Madge mentioned casually that she needed a secretary at Head Office. Plenty of volunteers dropped in but they needed supervising, things were getting in a muddle, she couldn't do it all herself because of her little boy coming home from school. Perhaps they knew of somebody?

In a shaking voice Miriam described her qualifications and experience.

'I haven't done anything like that before, but ...'

'Was it you who wrote inviting me? I've never had such a charming letter. When could you start? You'll learn as you go, I'll help you. If you can make do with two pounds five a week, that is. It's all we can spare.'

Nearly double what her last job had paid. Her face flamed.

'I can't be worth that much.'

'You will be,' said the deep voice. 'It's very responsible work; handling money, keeping books, corresponding with organisations here and abroad. Just wait, you'll be screaming for mercy. And the phone going all the time. And Committee meetings to prepare for.'

She looked at Simon in alarm.

'Go on girl,' he said. 'You can do it.'

They clinched it on the spot and rushed home to tell the folks they could get married.

And where would they like the wedding—that hall where her cousins had theirs was very nice, wasn't it? What, and all the relatives criticising the food and the speeches and each

other's clothes, no thanks. We only want you and Daddy and Philly. Private.

'Zol zein azoi,' said Ada; so be it. A new outfit she'd have needed, a waste, by the time Mortcheh's younger sons got married it would be out of fashion for sure. 'But you must let the shool have plenty of notice.'

Miriam looked at Simon, who looked down at his newspaper and revolved a knee.

'We're not getting married in synagogue,' she said. 'A Registry Office.'

The colour ebbed from Ada's face. 'A Register Office? It is not for Jews.'

'Just because we're Jews we don't have to be hypocrites, to stand there making promises to God and I don't know what.'

Ada twisted her hands. 'What will the mishpoocheh say?' —the family. 'And the Greenglasses next door? They're sure to get to know?'

Jacob stood up. 'Loz shoin oop, Ada,' he said strongly; let it be. 'What matters what others say, did they ask your opinion how they should marry? Mortcheh in a koimen,' a top hat, 'ridiculous! And prayers, from those who never go near a shool from one Rosh-Hashono-Yom Kippur to the next. In our little shtetl was impossible to do otherwise, but here? Wasn't it why we ran away, to be free to do what we want? Good luck to you, both!' He shook hands warmly with Simon, and gave Miriam a kiss.

'And what is left of Yiddishkeit,' Ada said stiffly. 'What does it mean to be a Jew if none of the customs is kept on, if one by one we throw everything away?' It leaves a hollowness inside, she wanted to say, but couldn't trust her voice.

'No, Meemeshee,' said Simon. 'We do not throw everything away. We do not throw away our history, for instance ...'

'And is not the religion a part of our history?'

'What is with you Ada,' said Jacob, surprised and amused. 'You are becoming religious again?'

'I am not becoming religious again. But I do not like that we stop to be Jews, that we forget who we are and where we come from and what has happened to us and what can still

happen to us. If we do not hold ourselves together we shall be farloiren,' meaning lost, but the Yiddish word sounded more desolate.

Simon's eyebrows shot to the top of his forehead. 'We shall be lost if we keep ourselves separate in a ghetto, clinging to customs that no longer have a meaning for us, and mumbling prayers we do not believe in. Did they help much the German Jews and the English Jews when they were slaughtering each other in the trenches? Where was their Yiddishkeit then? No, we must mix ourselves more with the world outside, with those whose interests are the same as ours, and build up a better life together with them, a life without wars and without anti-Semitism. It does not mean we must throw away our culture—and it is our culture what makes us Jews, more important for progressive people than religion is. When the negro Paul Robeson sings *Yisgadal*, when we sing *Ole Man River*, does that make our Yiddishkeit less? Just on the opposite, it makes it richer.'

'Hear hear,' said Miriam.

Ada spread out her hands, palms upward. 'Do as you understand.' If they are so far from a Jewish life, what will be with their children? They will be goyim, she thought with pain.

In the shop-doorway Miriam said, 'The way she goes on, anyone might think it was so marvellous being a Jew—and getting bashed on our Jewish noses everywhere. Poor old Mum. If she knew that we're only getting married legally because we want children, otherwise we'd just ...'

He showered kisses on her face. 'I want you so much, so much,' he murmured. 'Wonderful girl, your eyes, your lips, your hair, your prests ...'

Now that the day of their marriage was nearer it was harder to part than before. When she said goodnight he pulled her back, when he spoke of going she held him. Across the road a man wove his uncertain way to prop himself against a lamp-post, and fumbling at his trousers made water, a glittering arc in their direction. They moved out of sight. In the yards behind them sudden cat-cries rent the air and left it shuddering at the memory.

'I want to take you away from this,' he said into her ear.

'Let's go away for a weekend, somewhere where nature is green and beautiful. With the money from the wine shop I can get a little tent, we'll make a fire at night and sit under the stars, and I'll sing to you, beloved, and we will love each other, and love, and love . . .'

'Yes, yes,' she breathed. 'Darling, yes!'

'Miriam!' came the tired call from upstairs. 'Miriam! S'vert shpet!'—It's getting late.

Mouth to mouth, they burst out laughing.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The International Relief Committee had its office very handily over a café in a Bloomsbury back street. Upstairs she turned her own key in the lock, scooped up the post and sat down to deal with most of it herself, putting the rest aside to talk over with Madge. She chased speakers round on the phone for meetings arranged in a rush, packed up posters and leaflets for groups up and down the country, and for every donation she wrote individual thank-you letters (thrillingly signed Miriam Samuels, Secretary) trying to sound as madly happy for the pensioner's sixpennorth of stamps as for the fiver that Uncle Mortcheh would call a ness—a miracle.

It was a big, dilapidated room. She had, Madge insisted on it, the bigger of the two rickety little desks and the better of the ancient typewriters. There was a stationery cupboard so shallow that when you opened it everything fell out on the floor, a wooden filing cabinet it killed you to open, and a duplicator that broke down, naturally, when you were frantic with hurry. And there were furled-up banners and a fold-up platform and a long trestle table for collating duplicated pages on, and seating extra workers at, and counting the collections onto when the comrades came in with the tins. Once the total was entered into the cash book Madge woud say good, we can pay the rent out of that, and Miriam would run down and put it straight into the landlord's hand; or she said here's your wages or hooray we can buy envelopes now, or pay the phone bill; and then they banked the rest with the money that had come in the post. A chartered accountant who'd offered to run his eye over the bookkeeping clutched his head when he saw what they were doing.

'No-no-no!' he howled. 'Everything coming in must go

straight to the bank, every little farthing, every single stamp!' And dropping his voice to a stressful normal, he told them that bills must never never never be paid out of takings but each one separately by cheque, and for wages, rent, and office odds-and-ends they must draw a cheque for Petty Cash and keep a separate little book to show how it was spent.

'Kharashaw,' said Madge very calmly; having picked up some Russian during a study course in the Soviet Union she liked to slip in the odd word when she could. 'All right, all right, if that's the proper way to do, we'll do it.'

'You'd better, if you don't want to find yourself in jail.'

People dropped in throughout the day to get the platform for a lunchtime meeting or to do a job of work, and it was up to her to find them one and make them feel it was important, said Madge, seeing that they did it for nothing. Now and then an unemployed chap or a tramp came up, mistaking their function and hoping for a hand-out, and Madge explained carefully what the International Relief Committee was for but gave them a half-crown of her own, which Miriam thought excessive in terms of the ha'penny given at home to beggars, the more so as the chairman drew no wages, only expenses for travelling about. She herself gave them a shilling; they'd think she was mad at home.

Sometimes exciting visitors came from fraternal committees abroad to discuss matters of policy or a joint campaign. A Frenchman who stayed the day shook hands every time he came in and every time he went out, and each time a ceremony, holding her hand in his a moment and looking into her eyes so warmly and directly that she began to feel confused.

If there was nothing else to do she got out the endless lists of Labour and Communist Party branches and Trade Unions and Co-ops, and typed envelopes passionately for the current appeal or the next one. Madge, who lived with her husband and son in furnished rooms nearby, had to chase her down to lunch. She idolised the shapeless, keen-eyed woman for relying on her, for trusting her, for treating her as an equal though twice her age and ten times as clever. She never handed out a job without explaining why it needed doing

and what was hoped for as a result, and she was quick to forgive a mistake. When school broke up she brought Ian with her to the office now and then, and while they discussed the problems of the day he contentedly folded appeals into envelopes. He was a plump and placid boy, a year younger than her brother.

'Shall I bring Ian back sometime to play with you?' she asked Philip one day.

He gazed upward and out through the window. 'I dunno.'

'Adonoi,' said Ada. 'Adonoi means God! Bring him, bring him,' she told Miriam. 'He can sleep here overnight and go back with you in the morning, not to make special journeys for nothing.'

'Would you like to come and play with my brother one evening?' she asked Ian.

'Ah doan't mind.'

Madge came along with him the first time, and was invited to supper. She made a great impression on Jacob because she was so well up in politics in spite of being a woman, and on Ada because she was so womanly in spite of being political, asking how to make the hoobergritz soup, and looking at herself in the mirror a bit too much.

The boys spent the first twenty minutes ignoring each other and then went together into the yard, where Ian politely offered Philip a fight and Philip politely refused, so they kicked a ball about for a bit and then started peeing up Greenglass's fence to see who could go higher, and Ada, trying not to laugh, rapped on the window with her wedding ring; the old mother of Have-a-Look-and-See was taking in her washing, and on that side the fence was low.

Madge left after supper and the boys went on a tour of the cellars, including what Ian called the coal-mine, coming up with spectacles, moustaches, beards and gloves that had to be washed off, so Ada scrubbed their knees as well, saying they might as well clean their teeth and be ready for the night, and they lay sprawled on the floor upstairs reading each other's comics till she remembered to chase them into bed. Ten minutes later Miriam found them asleep and called her mother up to see the round pink-and-white face

and the long darkly flushed one side by side on the pillow. Ada sighed.

'He should only want to come again, the boy. Philipel is too much by himself always.'

'I know, that's why I brought him.'

And a week later she took Philip with her on the way to the office to spend the day with Ian. Madge's flat, where cooking was done on the landing and washing up in the bathroom, had a cupboardful of toys that widened Philip's eyes.

'It's a toyshop!' he remarked.

Miriam was just leaving when the noise of shattering glass brought her back. Ian had kicked a ball through the window, and mother and son turned to each other in dismay, each with a hand over their mouths, then Madge spluttered with laughter and so did Ian.

'Ee lad,' she said. 'We'll have to pay the landlord for that. Better mind that ball indoors or we'll have nothing left for your pocket-money.'

And Miriam thought of the tragic scene at home if a jug was broken; or a saucer; the reminders that went on all day.

At lunch Ian was describing a purchase of sweets. He was sure he'd been swindled. 'He were a proper Jew, he were,' he said of the shopkeeper.

She looked at Madge quickly, expecting her to tell him off, but she didn't, and waiting till the boys went into the other room to play, she said with an effort:

'I was surprised to hear a child of yours say such a thing.'

'Ian? Why, what did he say?'

Her voice shook a little, repeating it. Madge glanced at her briefly.

'Ian, here a minute!'

'What, ma?'

'D'you like Ivor?' she asked in her slow, deep voice, taking his hand.

'Oo-aye.'

'He's a Jew, you know. And Andrew, you like him?'

'Oo-aye.'

'He's a Jew too, and so is Miriam, and Philip, and their ma and pa. You listening, Ian?'

'Yes, ma. Can I finish me game now?'

She let him go. 'I thought that was the best way of handling it,' she explained, 'through people he likes. I'll tell him more another time. You're over-sensitive, Miriam—but you've every right to be. I once said in Moscow, phew, I've been working like a nigger, and what d'you think, there was a black comrade in the room! He told me off good and proper. I tried to explain that it was just a way of talking, I didn't mean it in a nasty way, but he said no true Communist or Socialist would use terms of contempt about another people, especially those that got kicked around. I was so ashamed!'

And yet she hadn't noticed what Ian said at the table.

Ten minutes from the office was the rubber goods shop that advertised Michael Fielding's book, *Parenthood, Design or Accident?* in the *Daily Worker*, but only men were going in. She walked up and down outside. Simon had the tent now, and a groundsheet, and other camping oddments, and he was waiting. How much longer could she keep him waiting? There'd been an incident in the kitchen the other night—superhuman he'd been, to tear himself from her at that moment. His face, contorted, savage, strange, had first frightened her, then raised her to exaltation: to be so violently desired! She was curious, eager, impatient for that experience that was the glory of the universe, and they were not ready for a baby, they wanted it by design, not by accident; so in you go my girl, go on. She wavered into the shop, saw a young man serving and fled, to walk up and down again till she'd mustered up the courage to pretend there was nothing to be ashamed of, and marching sternly up to the counter she practically shouted:

'Have you got that book you advertise in the *Daily Worker*?'

He gave her an odd look and said what book, so she had to give the title.

But it was worth it. Just what they needed, practical and to the point, calling things by their right names; so now she

knew everything, including the addresses of four birth control clinics. She travelled to the one furthest from home, and waiting till nobody was about, shot across the road into the door labelled MOTHERS' CLINIC, a funny name, considering, and up a narrow stairway into a cream-and-chocolate room that smelled of carbolic and was divided into curtained-off cubicles.

The doctor, thank heaven, was a woman with shining dark hair parted dead centre, who wanted to know when she was getting married, and she said next week; and her married name and address, and she gave the right name but a false address, what would her mother say if a letter came for Mrs Englander; but her stomach knotted up in protest against the lies she was telling to those level eyes across the table, and wanting her good opinion when the doctor asked if she knew what happened, she aired her newly-gained knowledge, but pronounced penis as pennies and vagina as if it rhymed with gleaner, and the doctor had to put her right ... Undressing in one of the cubicles she heard the nurse say crossly in another,

'That's all wrong, how could your husband possibly get in like that?' and hid her burning face in her hands.

Afterwards the doctor said she must use these for a time, and her husband those, later on they'd fit her with something she could use on her own; and in the kindly dark of the shop that night she slipped Simon the package that was his. Oh why was real life so embarrassing? And so complicated? In books lovers flew together like birds of the air—yes, she grinned, and had to marry in a rush like Rose and Monty were doing, with all the world knowing what they'd been up to and hardly time to breathe before the baby was there.

Another lie: they were going with Monty and Rose for a weekend, she told her mother, to that seaside boarding house she'd been to with Dad last year; her mother looked at her but only said she should enjoy herself, and on Friday night she bathed her body three times over to purify it for the arms of her lover.

On the train next day every word they exchanged seemed strained and artificial, every glance an electric shock, and they fell into a tremulous silence till it was time to get out

and walk to the farm where Mr and Mrs Englander were expected to camp overnight; she wore a wedding ring from Woolworth's. She said to Simon:

'All these lies, as if we were going to commit a crime!'

'It is a crime, in the eyes of bourgeois morality. One day it will be taken as natural.' He hugged her to him as they walked. 'Darling! Does it worry you?'

'Oh no!' She wanted him to see her as a child of nature, free, like Isadora Duncan. And in one way she was beginning to enjoy the deception. It made her feel they were defying the whole world with their love.

They got milk and water from the farmer, and he let them fill their palliasse with straw in the barn, and they pitched the little tent, and by that time it was dark but a steady drizzle made the longed-for fire impossible. They huddled cross-legged on the bed with their cold milk and sandwiches and Simon said a loaf of bread, my dearest, a glass of wine, and thou beside me; then they went outside to clean their teeth etcetera and came in to undress, and slid shaking violently under the blankets to prepare, which took time, and then she said *now*, and waited for heaven and earth to open and the glory of the universe to be revealed.

But nothing happened. Neither then, nor later when they tried again.

She lay listening to the patter of rain against the canvas, humiliated, vexed and perplexed; what was wrong? Michael Fielding hadn't actually said how to do it, and she'd thought it just happened by itself, but she hadn't known, for instance, that her legs would get in the way, what was one supposed to do with them for heaven's sake. Simon was whispering I'm sorry, I'm sorry, and turning to him she tasted salt tears, Simon—crying! Oh my darling, it doesn't matter, it's lovely just to be together like this, and she meant it. Marvellous to lie skin to skin with his hot rough body, being caressed all over and feeling his hard muscles under her hands, especially those great ones at the back of his thighs, and his heart thumping heavily against her breast every time they woke in the uneasy night.

In the morning an inquisitive sheep woke them finally poking its head through the opening of the tent, and they

laughed and were shy with each other, turning their backs to get dressed; but though they didn't yet know each other in the Biblical sense they felt like husband and wife, and were proud of having dared to sleep together without a legal permit, and she loved him more than ever because at the end of the day when she mislaid the camera and got in a panic, he made her sit down and recall where she'd put it first, and where next till step by step they came to where it was hiding, and he wasn't angry though they had to run all the way, he with that heavy rucksack on, only catching the train by the skin of their teeth.

Their dream flat was self-contained, with a bathroom and garden, in Stamford Hill desirably, but they'd settle for Clapton, Stoke Newington, even Dalston at a pinch. Every Sunday afternoon, having tramped around to survey the field, they set their sights a little lower. First the garden went, then the self-containment, and lastly the bathroom, even one shared between two flats or more sent the rent rocketing to twenty-five shillings; a pound a week was their absolute limit.

One bright summer's day Ada was with them when a little old lady in a large old house beside Clapton Common led the way slowly up three floors to the top and showed them two spacious rooms, kitchenette and lavatory; a guinea a week, and they could use the coal shed down in the yard. The front-room windows overlooked part of the Common, the pond, and paths curving towards the main road, that could be heard but not seen; and the bedroom window framed part of Springfield Park and a reservoir reflecting the sun. Their eyes signalled, let's grab it! but Ada was going round pointing out defects to the landlady. The walls needed doing up. The ceilings were low. They'd never squeeze a scrubbing pail under that tap in the sink, and oi vei! only one cupboard! If only it was cheaper, a young couple just starting out in life, with everything still to get for their home ... Mrs Blumenfield raised her delicate eyebrows, spread out her frail little hands, and said:

'If it makes such a difference to them, I knock off two shillings, but they must take it at once, from this minute.'

Simon promptly stepped forward and paid the first week's nineteen shillings, he'd move in with a mattress and save the rent of his room; and like two mad things they raced over the Common, off their heads with delight. Ada said, catching up with them at the tram stop, you see that a mother can still be of use?

Monty and Rose, when they heard offered the use of their bathroom; they lived nearby. But Simon said later to Miriam:

'What's wrong with the Public Baths? I don't want no favours from no one.'

And now they could order the furniture.

Abram Mitznik said, 'For you, Miriam, it will be furniture fit for a princess.'

He reckoned it would take him two months to make it, and they chose the bride's nineteenth birthday for the wedding, Madge saying she could take a week off for the honeymoon. They couldn't afford to go away, but who'd need a holiday, living between the Park and the Common? Abram sent along catalogues, two of each to give her a choice; the very latest in bedroom, dining and sitting room suites. She studied them for hours and couldn't decide, and asked Simon to choose; he leafed through briskly saying this and this and this. At once she knew for certain she wanted the others.

'Are you sure,' she faltered, 'don't you think perhaps ...'

'Oh darling, it doesn't really matter, does it?' he said impatiently. 'Have what you like, I don't care.'

What she liked Abram said was too plain; they wrangled playfully, and compromised. She'd have the walnut suite she preferred for the bedroom rather than the mahogany he advised, but the tops of the wardrobes and the twin bed-heads, instead of being a straight line as in the picture, would descend in three little steps from the centre to the sides; then it turned out that the geometrical design on the veneer would have to follow the shape of the steps ... and the dining room furniture, which they all agreed should be light oak, was to have a dark one-inch border round everything; he coaxed her into it. But one thing she was firm about, only a single mirror on the dressing-table instead of the three in the picture; and he called her an akshon, meaning

obstinate. When she told Simon the difficulties she was having he looked at her quizzically.

'Didn't you say once it was only narrow-minded people who made a fuss about their houses and furniture?'

She flushed. 'It's just for once, Simon. After all, we'll have to live with the stuff for ever.'

'Well leave me out of it,' he said shortly. 'I've got more important things to worry about.' He was organising a Garden Fête in aid of a Biro-Bijan hospital and she wasn't helping him, there being so much to do in the evenings, measuring the windows and floors in the flat twice over to satisfy her mother she'd got them right, and giving her a hand with cutting things out, and a couple of trips to the dressmaker about a new dress for the day. Three Thursday afternoons running she had to ask Madge for time off to go with her parents to the warehouses for lino and linen and bedding and things. Madge looked a bit stunned at all this buying.

'When Bill and me got wed we bought the lot in a couple of hours at Woolworths. But then we've never had a home of our own, we always had to get digs,' and Miriam felt very bad, having a home of her own right away.

Never again would she buy from a warehouse. You had to make agonising decisions without a moment to dither between all the different colours and qualities, they let it be known they were doing you a big favour, wholesale prices for a piffling order when all round them people were asking for dozens and grosses. She looked forward to the luxury of getting the small household items like a normal person at the ironmongers round the corner, where they were happy to serve you. Suddenly she thought of asking if there was enough money in her Post Office account to pay all the warehouse bills, and Ada said fiercely:

'Daddy and I want for you to have everything what is only needed for a home, my child, everything what we couldn't have when we married, and cannot have now, and never will have because we haven't got the space. If there will not be enough in your book we will put to it, so you should have it.' And her sewing machine flew urgently night after night,

producing bedspreads and curtains and tea-towels bought by the yard.

One Sunday afternoon she and Simon took the manufactured goods to the flat, and while he drove nails into the window frames she drew string through the curtains. They hung the blue ones in the dining room and the green in the bedroom, and couldn't understand why they sagged in the middle though he pulled the string as tight as he could. He got so irritable climbing up and down that she left it; with a separate frill hiding the top of each pair the sag didn't show too much.

When Abram invited her to the workshop before the finishing touches were made she was taken aback by the brilliance of the bedroom furniture, and said laughingly that they wouldn't need a mirror; he assured her it would tone down in time, and led her to the oak dining room suite. Her face fell. She'd imagined a pale beige. It was practically yellow.

'Silly girl,' he said, 'you want a bit of colour in it, otherwise it would be too dull.'

A good thing the armchair cushions weren't covered yet. She wanted them in dark blue rexine like the rest of the upholstery, and he said everyone had velvet. She said they didn't particularly want the same as everyone; she thought velvet too ostentatious.

'Listen to me,' he said testily. 'I suppose you think that because you're grown up you know everything, yes? But I remember you since you came from Poland in your plooshener mantel mit der plooshener pochovka . . .' She groaned. That plush coat with the plush lining again. '. . . and I think I know a tiny little bit more about furniture than you do. Rexine will crack, see? It is not soft like leather, and even leather would be too cold to sit on, that is why people have velvet for the cushions. But if you go to make a long nose over it, all right. I make from rexine, but don't come back afterwards and blame me.'

What she wanted to blame him for immediately was for over-stuffing the divan they'd chosen in place of the usual three-seater settee, wanting to put people up on it sometimes. She nerved herself to ask if they wouldn't slip off in

the middle of the night, and he said if it was flat there'd soon be a hollow in the middle. Perhaps he was right; anyway he was a friend of the family, impossible to ask him to do the job again, and Simon would say it was not important. But every time she turned to look again at the rounded, shiny surface of the divan she could have murdered the maker.

Ada said tentatively, 'The day of your wedding, Mirry, I would like to make a little supper, just for the family.'

'Oh—who?'

'The uncle and the aunt, nateerlich, and Rivka Rochel and Yossel ...'

'Him!'

'Not possible *not* to ask him. And the Mitzniks, and us five makes eleven, but with both ends of this table pulled out, and the little one from upstairs, I think we can squeeze ourselves in.'

'But Mummy ...'

'Of course, Meemeshee,' Simon said heartily, 'it will be very nice.'

Afterwards they argued it out in the shop-doorway.

'Rivka Rochel's all right,' she said, 'but the others, they just don't mean anything to me. If only it was the family from Poland!'

'But they are not here, and these others are,' he said sharply. 'Your parents haven't got nobody else but them. We already refused your mother so much, surely we can let her have this pleasure. You're being selfish, Miriam.'

Oh he was right, he was right.

'Well, if it's got to be a public occasion, let's have Rose and Monty as well.' And Simon said they'd have to eat off the counter.

A week before the wedding everything had been delivered and the lino laid down; imitation parquet in the dining-sitting room, imitation marble in the bedroom; and in the tiny kitchen the blue-and-white checks were repeated by the gingham curtains. Her eyes shone.

'Oh Simon, look!'

But he was more impressed with the dining room, that she secretly found disappointing without knowing why. It

wasn't just the bilious yellow of the oak, and it wasn't the inhospitable divan, as even with her back to it she felt the same. Oh it was all good solid stuff, with no useless twiddly bits to catch the dust; every piece square or rectangular except for the coffee table, which was octagonal. And room for everything to be put away, no excuse for a walowka here, she grinned, recalling the heap behind the stair-curtains at home. Apart from the sideboard they had storage cupboards, instead of legs, below the dining table, and if only Abram had made the cupboards a bit shallower the chairs wouldn't have to stand away so distantly.

She walked about, trying to like the room. It needed getting used to, that was all, the contrast with the shabby, littered little kitchen she'd grown up in. A few bright cushions in those gaping armchairs, and later on a fire in the grate, would surely make it cosier. No pictures or ornaments, they'd agreed they were old-fashioned, the only exception a pair of imitation marble vases brought from home. She put them on the bedroom mantelpiece. They'd be useful for flowers.

This room was nicer, the furniture less heavy; they'd flung open the big window and the light green curtains fluttered coolly in the breeze. Simon was knocking nails all over the kitchen and she called him to help unpack the bedding. Bright-eyed, they made up the beds with the best cotton sheets, the rest being unbleached calico that boiled white in time and lasted for ever. When she reached for the second green bedspread Simon smilingly pressed her down on the uncovered bed, and then it began to get serious.

'I haven't got anything with me,' she whispered.

'It will be all right with what I've got,' he urged. 'Let's, oh *let's*!'

But Mrs Blumenfield knocked, asking so nicely to see their things that they couldn't very well refuse, and she praised their taste, so quiet, so refined, and told them how important his home was to a Jew, how it was the centre of everything. She thought the religion of the Christians must be inferior because they went away for their holy days if only they could afford it, she said, while Jews celebrated theirs at home, and Simon said all religions distracted

people from improving their lot on earth by promises of a better time in heaven, and then she pointed out that Miriam would lose the last tram home if she didn't leave soon, and continued to stand there, arms folded, till she did.

Outside the front door they caught their breath. The Common lay silvered in moonlight, and they embraced beside the pond with anguish at having to separate on such a night as this, with joy at the new life unfolding before them like a flower.

'Open your eyes when you kiss me,' she begged.

But he couldn't.

They watched the moon shivering in the water below the upside-down plane trees and took deep breaths of the clean night air. She sighed.

'To think that only a few miles away they're sitting there stifling in those packed little houses with fly-paper over their heads, Mum and Dad and everybody, and the noise and the stinks and the drunks outside. It makes me feel like a deserter.'

'Why darling? Wouldn't they all get out of it if they could? Nothing wrong in making our life as nice as we can, so long as we fight to make it better for others as well, so long as we don't forget them.'

She recited softly,

'And if the sun will shine,
Licking the wounds of our toil with soft, warm tongue,
Still we shall remember the cancer of capitalism
Gnawing at the heart of this, our warm, beautiful world ...'

The fifty-three was clanging its way towards their stop and they ran for it.

'Next week this time it will go away without you, little wife.'

'Next week, my husband!'

She waved from the platform till carried out of sight of the short and sturdy figure by the lamp-post. He always stood like that, a hand on a hip, legs astride, planted as firmly as if he grew from the earth, as if he could never be

uprooted, never even bent, not by storms nor by any human being. Oh, he was of the earth, earthy; when she floated off he drew her back, making her face the reality of things. More than a year since they'd stood on that hill and his eyes had cleared and he saw at last that he loved her like a man, more than two since she understood that she'd always loved him. She'd been a child when he first came over her horizon, today she was a woman, with a woman's desires, and from that day to this his thinking, his dreaming, his singing, his soul, had woven themselves into the fabric of her being. Now his bodily life would be knitted in also, a new pattern would emerge.

All the way, and in bed at night, she saw the lamp-light falling on his massive temples where the hair had begun to retreat, and on his high cheekbones, and his wide and hungry mouth. One week more.

The following evening he came to say there was no more work for him in his workshop, nor likely to be at any other.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

She came home from the office and he was talking to her parents and they all looked serious and he told her. He was signing on.

'Mirry—I've decided to get a shop as soon as possible. Your parents will lend the money to put down and their warehouses will give us credit.' The *Jewish Chronicle* was open on the table.

She dropped onto a chair. 'Simon! No!'

'There isn't no other way for us, my dear. I can't walk about doing nothing while you work. In any case your wages by themselves would not be enough, not even counting my seventeen shillings dole money.'

Caught off-guard, she burst into tears. In front of everybody. Philip slipped outside to the swing, and Simon came to stroke her head. A customer shouted Shop!

'All right,' said Jacob, rising. 'I will go.'

Ada said, 'Such a big girl crying? A kalleh-meidel?' A bride? 'What is so terrible, what? It is not a death sentence.'

'It is, it is!'

'Ach, do not be a child. You are ashamed for your comrades, yes? Because you will stop to be a proletarian?'

'What's there to be proud of, selling vests and pants?'

'And what is to be ashamed? Everyone needs them, even the king, and Harry Pollitt! They are just as important as books.'

'How do you know, when do you ever have time to read a book? I don't want to be like you!'

'Shh ... shh,' said Simon, as Ada bit her upper lip and walked out into the shop.

'You don't know what it's like,' she wept. 'How will we ever get to a meeting in time, or a lecture or anything, or a holiday together, or even a weekend, the shop open till late

on Saturdays and a whole day off only two or three times a year. And I won't give up my job, I won't, just when for the first time in my life I found something I like doing—and the flat?' She sat up. 'You don't mean to give up the flat and live in some rotten hole like this behind a shop?'

'Hey, just a minute, don't run! You think every shop must be like this one! But they advertise here two lock-ups. Your Daddy is coming with me to see them. You will keep your nice flat, don't worry, and your nice job. I will not expect from you to stand behind a counter with me just because I can't do nothing better.'

'How do you know you can't? You never had a chance to try. Couldn't you study for something, you always wanted to be an engineer?'

'I already asked about it. It's not likely they'd take me on, when I haven't got no education behind me, and in any case it takes three years or five years and hundreds of pounds. Much more than a shop. Don't forget I'm a bloody foreigner.'

'If Mum and Dad can lend money for a shop they could lend a bit more for your training.'

'And what do we live on meanwhile? Your earnings will pay the rent and maybe food, maybe not. What about coal, what about a pair of shoes and a warm coat sometimes? And what about a baby? Your parents can't keep a second family, and if they could I would not let them. No, Miriam, I thought into it a lot. You must make peace with the idea that you will have a shopkeeper for a husband. Don't make such a big tragedy out of it. Thousands would be glad to have the chance. We'll have holidays together, I promise you, so soon as we can afford. We will still go to meetings and be active in the movement, nothing will keep me away, not the devil himself. I will shut the shop early and bugger the customers! I will not shiver like your parents over losing a sixpence ... tst-tst-tst, look what you're doing to your eyes!' He put one warm hand over hers, and with the other tilted her chin. 'Come on girl, let me see your lovely smile.'

She smiled faintly. 'A fat lot of money you'll make, shutting up early, going away for holidays. And giving stuff

away for nothing to your friends, I suppose, like you did in the Warsaw bakery—and not watching the customers because you don't believe workers pinch things!'

One of the lock-ups was worth considering. Not a drapery but a dress-shop at the moment, so he'd have to build up custom from scratch, but in a market street, he could have a stall outside his own door, and the nice girl who worked there was willing to stay on. The parents said oi vei, such big expenses to hang round his neck, how will he ever get anywhere, two lots of rent and a worker to pay whether business is good or bad? But without a wife behind the counter to do it for nothing, someone else's pair of hands must be hired. Not possible to run a shop and a stall single-handed. And the position is a good one, off the City Road, let us hope for the best; and they paid the deposit. In two weeks he could open.

The evening before the wedding it was too hot to light a fire. Ada had to bake the big apple cake and hundreds of kichlech in the old black stove in the cellar. Down she went with the biscuit-tin lids full of raw circles, half-moons and stars, a blanched almond in the centre of each. Up she came when they'd turned the right shade of gold, and in between she kept running down to change their position in the oven. Without exception the very best she'd ever made in her life, taste one, Jacob! Taste just a crumb, from pure butter this time, and best eggs. But he was afraid of their freshness, with his stomach.

'You expect a whole army, I see.'

'Thirteen, kein ein-horeh.' A joke; she didn't believe in the evil eye, not even for the number thirteen.

'A meshigahss,' he shrugged; madness. 'How will they sit?'

'Every one of them will sit, you'll see. Two chairs they promised me from next door—a pity Yankeleh has gone for his holidays this week. One more, one less, makes no difference with so many. You got the whisky?'

A good thing she'd mentioned it. Home-made cherry brandy she'd put down a year ago, but the men liked something stronger.

'Tomorrow go straight out and buy. Two bottles, remem-

ber. Ach, Jacob, do not make a face, Mortcheh likes a drink, and so does the son-in-law-to-be. It is a wedding after all.'

'Where is it written that at a wedding we must get drunk?'

He watched her running up and down with enthusiasm after a whole day on her feet, while he, who'd rested in the afternoon, was dropping. So many mixing bowls and baking tins and heaven knows what he'd already washed, and whenever he thought he was done she brought him more. Here you are, you should know your only daughter gets married.

'You don't think at all of going to bed tonight?'

She laughed, and he went up alone. When the baking was done she made schav-borsht—sorrel soup—and tasting it after thickening it with egg yolks, swayed her head. Delicious. Absolutely ideal in such a heat, it would cool overnight in the cellar and she'd serve it cold, in cups, with a plate of hot potatoes and butter, and the soft cheese now dripping its last drips from triangular linen bags downstairs.

Miriam came home as she was gathering together the raw materials for the next course.

'You're not still cooking?'

'Only the gefilteh fish.'

'But I want to do your hands!'

'Ai, who looks at an old woman's hands?'

She insisted, she had to do her own anyway. So Ada abandoned the cooking and they soaked their hands together in warm, soapy water and scrubbed them, and Miriam cut open a lemon—a whole lemon, ai-ai-ai!—and rubbed the juice into those scars and stains and tried pushing the cuticles back but it was impossible, they were too overgrown, and she had to be content with buffing the nails to a faint shine.

'Now isn't that better?'

'You want to make the mother into a fashionable lady? Go, go to bed, mein kalleh-meidel. Get a good night's sleep.'

'I'm not going till you do. It's one o'clock!'

Ada pulled thoughtfully at her lower lip. 'All right. The fish will keep till tomorrow, so fresh they are, they spurt with blood still—I'll show you.' She moved to the yard-door.

'No, no, I believe you, I believe you!'

'Then just bring me up the cheese bags from downstairs, and we'll press them between plates for overnight.'

And at six in the morning she crept down again, taking her chopping board out to the counter with a cloth underneath to deaden the noise, and chopped the bream with the carp and the cod, and beat up the egg whites left over from the soup, and mixed it in with the other bits and pieces, and little by little, with great care at the end, she added the ground almonds, chopping and tasting and adding and tasting, and praying the raw stuff wouldn't give her heartburn, not today, God please. As soon as the fish began to simmer its fragrance drifted upstairs, bringing them all down early, wide awake and excited, to get in each other's way at the sink. At breakfast Lily burst in with her shining morning face to thrust a package tied with satin ribbon into Miriam's hands.

'Lily, you shouldn't!'

A pair of garters sewn with tiny blue rosebuds.

'S-s-something old, s-s-something new,' she chanted. 'Something borrowed, something blue.' Splay-footed she stood, towering over them.

'It's so nice of you, they're lovely,' and when the smiling, spotless girl clattered down on her high heels to change into her working clothes, she said to her mother, 'I hope you told the others I don't want presents?' So conventional, giving presents just because one was supposed to.

'I told them, I told them.' Ada flew in and out, serving, cooking, chasing Philip to school when he wanted to hang about and enjoy the uproar. 'Enough that they give you the afternoon off, go. And Jacob, the *Tseit* won't get cold but your egg will. Lily, do not chatter into my head this morning, I beg you, I don't know what I'm doing as it is. Noo, make a start, the silver, the door-knobs, make even nicer than for Passover. I've ironed the curtains, they're upstairs on a bed—and bring me down a clean towel and a couple of tea-towels, and the lavatory don't forget, the seat should be like snow.'

'C-c-can't I stay on after?' pleaded Lily. She always had a half-day off on Thursdays. 'I'll help you.'

'I'm sorry, I only wish you could, but I won't be able to turn round myself when the whole crowd is here.'

Miriam went for a haircut and a bath and came home to wash her hair and change into the new dress, artificial silk, with long sleeves, a flared skirt and a collar that lay open or closed. It fitted well, it slimmed her, but she was unhappy about the colour.

'I shouldn't have got this sort of blue, Mummy. It makes me look yellow.'

Ada, who thought the same, said, 'It is very, very nice, my child. Don't have aggravation. It is only because you are so pale this morning.' Pale, pale to the lips, but the eyes, how they blaze, ooh va va!

The father could see nothing wrong with the dress.

'Meerkeleh,' he said. 'Meerkeleh!'

Embarrassed by the intensity of his gaze she started laying the table for lunch though Lily hadn't finished cleaning the floor. The Greenglasses came in carrying their chairs, mitten drinnen—in the middle of everything—and had to be given a drink. Mrs G. took too big a swallow of whisky and got one of her coughing fits, nebich, one instantly knew what happened when she coughed. Philip ran back from school and submitted with good grace to washing and changing before lunch; and you should not get dirty again, you hear me, let me turn up your shirt-sleeves just in case, and Jacob, a good thing would be you should also get yourself ready before the meal, not to start looking for a collar stud when we are in a hurry for the register office.

So to mark his sense of occasion he cleaned his shoes with polish instead of spit and washed his head under the tap a second time that day, and vanished upstairs, Gottsudanken, one less under her feet for half-an-hour. He came down in his light grey suit, new last summer, to stand combing his hair and moustache at the mirror, blue eyes alight and cheeks very pink. Who would believe the man is forty-six already, he looks younger than me, hardly a crease in his face or a grey hair in his head. And who to see him now would guess the trouble I have making him eat as much as he should. She brought a new white handkerchief in from

the shop to tuck into his breast pocket, and he kissed her hand as she did it.

Just in time to sit down with them at the table came the choosen himself; the bridegroom, with the new white shirt they'd given him, the flaming red tie he'd bought himself, his smile full of teeth and much too short a haircut, the barber what did it should have his hands chopped off. They shut the shop firmly at one o'clock, heroically ignoring the raps and taps and surly kicks at the door, and had the meal without interruption, the two young people so close together one couldn't have pushed a straw between them. You can move apart, said Jacob, there's plenty of space!

While the others cleared up she took a kettle of hot water down to the cellar and got herself ready there, then Simon put up the shutters and they went, with umbrellas, it was pouring, and better so; the cooler it gets the more chance for the fish to get geglivert—to jell. She sent Miriam and Simon ahead with Philip, and followed with Jacob a few minutes later; it is not a demonstration, she said. She didn't want to attract attention, especially not the Greenglass's, having allowed them to think they were going for a private ceremony at the synagogue that unfortunately was in the opposite direction.

A few questions from the Registrar, a few answers from the children and basta! it was over, they were signing their names, which she did with great concentration. The Registrar shook hands all round, Jacob asked Miriam and Simon what they thought of married life, and they went laughing out into the rain, on opposite pavements this time.

'Ober vee kimt doos, vee kimt doos, antkegen a choopeh in shool? Es hot doch nisht kein neshoomeh!' How can one possibly compare this with a synagogue wedding? It has no soul!

'Who says one needs a soul in order to marry?' Jacob's moustache rippled, he was in the best of spirits.

He misses nothing, nothing of the past, not the ceremonies, not the shtetl, not the family, while I, I am still tied to it all with a birth-cord that grows stronger instead of weaker with the years. Go explain it. Maybe it is enough for his small energies to wrestle with the present and worry

himself to death for the future. Maybe that for him the past holds nothing to long for. There'd been too much strife in that family, too many children, too poor, left fatherless too young. But her family life had been beautiful, yes, yes, beautiful it had been in spite of everything, and on such a day to be so cut off from one another, ach! it is not good. At least the old mother, our holy mother, Eli had called her in his letter ... She drove her mind forward. What must be done, first when we get indoors, and what next and what next.

Most of the guests were there by seven, placing their streaming umbrellas into a pail by the door and their hats and coats on the counter. Chaya took Mortcheh's bowler from him by force, saying we are not going to pray here, and he looked lost sitting down with nothing on his knees to gaze into—how pretty she was still, eyes as blue as her brother's, and that charming nose. Yossel had cleaned himself up, and if his face wasn't so bitter, if he held himself straight, he'd still be a good-looking man. He wore his new raincoat, bought five years ago, there was a twenty-year-old one that Rivka Rochel called middle-aged. She danced in in her perfume and pearls, bubbling over, a party, and Abram was there. But the Mitzniks were subdued, Yenta more noticeably, embracing all who were embraceable but without her usual gusto. I understand them, my poor friends, no such nachess awaits them; no such joy. First the wife, then the husband, at her direction, squeezed themselves between the sofa and the table drawn lengthwise along it, and Ada kept tight hold of Rivka Rochel, saying the remaining space was for Chaya but oi, that woman, the minute her back was turned she slipped in beside Abram and laughingly refused to budge. Monty and Rose were the last to come—two such big people—the best place for them was by the door. It had to be opened to take a chair with its back to the counter for Rose, so that she actually sat in the shop. Rivka Rochel, looking hard at her belly, asked how long she'd been married.

'Two months,' said Rose, and turned crimson, and Monty said cheerfully, 'I'm a fast worker, you see.'

Jacob and Simon poured the whisky and the cherry brandy

and straight away they all started singing *The Rebbe Eli Melech*, accompanied by Philip on his mouth-organ and their own stamping feet. Jacob looked nervously up at the swaying lamp-shade and was opening his mouth to protest when she hissed, no, Jacob, into his ear; let be, the devil won't take it.

The white cloth she'd made for her own wedding covered both tables easily. In the centre was a heap of rolls, plaited and shining, and two big plates of fish, each piece with its bright circle of cooked carrot on top. A pity it hadn't jelled firmly, but the women were praising its whiteness, its desirably light colour, they meant. It should only taste as good as it looks, and she watched Mortcheh, who opened his eyes at the first mouthful, and said solemnly, Oisgetseichent!—Excellent!—and she relaxed. Then they were swaying their heads over the sorrel soup, mmm ... *mmm*! And the cheese, Ada, it is better than the best double cream, how did you do it?

Yossel, hunched over his plate opposite Miriam, said, 'If you don't wear a ring who'll know you're married?'

'It doesn't matter,' she said calmly. 'I don't want to be labelled as if I was somebody's property.'

'Huh! Still making yourself out to be a Communist?' he sniffed. 'Some Communist, with a shop!'

Simon said sharply, 'I know shopkeepers who are progressive people—and pressers who are reactionaries!'

Yossel's eyes bulged; his loose lips fell apart. 'If not for this reactionary,' he said loudly, 'you would have starved here, Pilsudski, in this goldeneh medineh.' In this rich land. 'Who found you a job and filled your belly when you first came off the onion boat, so hignorant we had to teach you how to eat an egg?'

Rivka Rochel said into the sudden silence, 'Er heibt shoin oon, meiner.' He's starting already, my man.

Simon, white-faced, half-rose from his chair, but Ada pushed him back, stroking his arm. 'Chimon dear, a song, I beg you, everyone is waiting.' But Miriam asked Rivka Rochel to sing solo *In Mein Shiffel Foon Elfenbein*—in my little ship of ivory—and she did so gladly, dark eyebrows updrawn, while the mouth-organ picked out the melody and

the company swayed to the rhythm. Please Ada, begged Jacob, do not rattle with the knives and forks till it's over.

Now the tea, the apple cake, the kichlech, and Simon, his colour and good humour restored, was thanking the guests for the celebration, and you will excuse us, I hope, for finishing the evening now, we must not miss the last bus and tram as we have Miriam's clothes and things to carry, but one more song before we go, and they burst spontaneously into *Choosen-Kalleh Mazeltov*.

Mortcheh was first on his feet when it ended. 'Noo, Chaya, men-darf-gehen!'—We-must-go.

'Wait, wait a little minute, Mortcheh,' said Ada. 'In such a hurry we are not.' She nudged Jacob. 'Give another glass to everyone.' And he gave. They struggled out of their seats after that, and into the shop for the final round of kissing, wishing and thanking. The young couple were the last to leave.

'It was a wonderful evening, Meemeshee,' said Simon, and he hugged her.

'Mummy, Daddy, a million thanks for everything. Philly, you played beautifully. Come and see us soon!'

'What, you are not coming home tonight?' Ada said laughingly. 'Why not?'

'Because this young man here wants me to sleep with him!'

'Ai-ai-ai! And once you were so shy!'

They waved them to the corner, and sighed, and came in to the shock of the big mess. Jacob said ruefully, 'Oi, vei, what we still have waiting for us here.'

Philip squeezed himself behind the table to lie down on the sofa, playing a mournful tune.

'Is that all you can think to do, in this disorder?' said his father, raising his voice.

'Loz im oop,' she said in an undertone—leave him alone. 'Come, Philipel, give a hand, you are our big helper now, yes?'

'S'pose so,' he said sheepishly.

'So, don't stand looking. Take upstairs the little table and the two chairs what belongs there, one at a time. And put outside the one from the shop and the two from Greenglass's.

Jacob, no need to fold that tablecloth so exactly, throw it down to the cellar for washing. Better push me back the table to its right place, I should have where to put down the washing up, and sweep only the middle of the floor, we should not tread in the crumbs.'

What I would give to be in bed at this moment.

'Anything else Mum?'

'Nothing more. Here, here is your toothbrush and paste, go clean the teeth under the outside tap, the sink is too full, and then straight to bed, no more playing, tomorrow is a day like any other. And hang up your cap on its hook!' she said shrilly.

When Jacob shouts at him I'm angry, yet I myself do the same, and when she'd put the last fork on the table she left Jacob wiping up, and pulled herself upstairs by the banister. He was in bed with the light on, large-eyed, pale.

'So now you have got this nice room for yourself,' she said brightly. 'The whole cupboard, and all these drawers for your things.' She opened and shut them. 'You will miss the sister, yes? So will we. But we have still got you.' She smoothed his hair.

'S'all right Mum,' he muttered, uneasy as ever under caresses, and she stopped. 'Can I go to Clapton Common Saturday? Mirry said soon.'

'Saturday? No, my child. You forget that Saturday you must stand by the stall to let Daddy go home for his dinner? And tea-time you must take him his tea.' What can we do, Jacob cannot eat dry food all day, and a stranger we cannot trust. 'Sunday they will be here, you should make a time with them then.'

Resisting the impulse to kiss him, she wished him goodnight and turned out the light. More and more he looks like the other one, especially when he is pale; fear stabbed her. He'd been lying down on the sofa so often lately, it wasn't right, a boy of ten should be bursting with energy. Tomorrow she would take him to the doctor; and emerged into the kitchen to find Jacob at the table with his head in his hands.

'And what is with you, Jacob, what?'

'Nothing, it's nothing ...' After a silence he looked up. 'I only just realised our little girl will not be here with us

any more, kneeling on that chair with her book on the table, not knowing what goes on round her. Oh Ada,' he said huskily, and paused to clear his throat. 'Do you remember that first evening at Chaya's, when you brought her back to me from Poland, and when I lifted my little finger she came straight out with me for a walk to Whitechapel, talking like a grown person in her lovely Yiddish. How happy I was then, the whole world was mine!'

'And happy you should be now,' she said strongly, 'and the whole world yours, that two such little people as we are climbed out of our poverty to bring up our child so well, and that she starts now her own life in such a great comfort, and with such a good husband. Do you remember what *we* came back to after the chóopeh, the one room with the poor old mother, nebich, the other side of the curtain?'

'Whether I remember! What a question.' He drummed on the table. 'But whether he is a good husband still remains to be seen.'

'He is good, he is good.' She got him his hot milk, and a cup of tea for herself. 'Eat, Jacob. Eat a cream-cracker and butter.'

He looked at her. 'If he is only half as good a husband as you are a wife, I shall have nothing to complain, my eishess chayeel'—My virtuous woman.

'Go, go.' She buried her face in her hands. 'I am not so good as you imagine.'

What would he say to his eishess chayeel if he knew she was jealous of her own daughter; a fine thing. Even to herself she was ashamed to admit it, the envy that had crawled up into her happiness like a ladder into a perfect silk stocking, on seeing Miriam's completed flat the other day. To have so much so soon, and so easily. Did she know, she doubted if she knew, how hard it was to come by if one had to earn it all oneself. And that wasn't all, for still more she envied her her education, and her strong husband, and her not being chained by the ankle to a shop. She'd be free to come and go, to interest herself in social questions, to take part in the world outside. Oh, she didn't begrudge her any of it, absolutely not, wasn't it what one struggled for, that the children should live better than the parents, only ...

she'd so longed for those things herself, and after all these years she still stood on the same spot.

She rested her elbows on the table and her twined fingers on the empty cup. With one less to provide for, and if business picked up a bit, maybe they could still hope for something better for themselves. Perhaps make a bathroom down in the cellar (what, for the landlord? Jacob would say). Perhaps he could give up the market on weekdays and not be so worn out, perhaps she could go to an evening class and learn at least to write English. We should only be well, all of us ... The cup crashed into the saucer, startling them both, for both were nodding. She stood up.

'Come Jacob. Come, Jacobel. Two such work horses as we are, we must get our rest. Morgen darf men zich einshpannen oifsnei.'—Tomorrow we must harness ourselves in afresh.

And taking his hands in hers, she hauled him, laughing and protesting, to his feet.

GLOSSARY OF WORDS AND PHRASES NOT EXPLAINED IN TEXT

azoi	*So. That's it.*
balleboosta	*mistress of the house*
Barmitzvah	*boy's thirteenth birthday*
benkert	*bastard*
beshtand	*mess*
bittereh gelechter	*ironic laughter*
bombeh	*bomb, a great lump*
booba	*grandmother*
boobenyu	*grandmother (diminutive); also used for baby or young child*
borsht	*beetroot soup*
briss	*circumcision*
broigess	*on bad terms, not on speaking terms*
Bund	*Jewish Labour Socialist Party in Poland and Russia*
chazan	*cantor*
cheder	*religious school*
choleria	*curse*
choopeh	*wedding canopy at religious wedding*
chootspa	*cheek, nerve, daring, outrageous*
chorben	*disaster, tragedy*
cigarette-kelech	*little cigarettes (sarcastic, contemptuous)*
deck	*feather overlay for bed*

dee greener dee	*you greenhorn you*
diamonten	*diamonds*
doch	*yet, still, however*
einfall	*idea*
ein horeh	*an evil eye*
einmool in a yoivel	*once in a blue moon, a rare appearance*
Erev Shabbess	*lit. Sabbath Eve; actually Friday (the whole day)*
Ess shmekt, ess far-raist	*appetising, whets the appetite*
farbrengen	*enjoy*
farbrenter	*red-hot*
fargoyisht	*made into Gentile*
fartachlevet	*carelessly mislaid*
ferdelech	*little horses*
fluskett	*flung*
forshpeis	*appetiser, hors d'oeuvre, first course*
gastfreindlich	*hospitable*
gazlan, reitseiach	*thief, murderer (used jokingly in the text)*
gesheft	*business or shop*
geshmakkeh	*tasty*
gevalt!	*lit. force, help! Also exclamation of wonder or fear*
gezinter-heit	*be well, farewell*
Gott gerechter	*God the Righteous*
Gottsudanken	*thank God*
goya	*Gentile woman*
goyim	*Gentiles*
goyisheh	*pertaining to Gentiles*
groschen	*smallest Polish coin*
hammerl, hammerl klap	*little hammer, little hammer, tap away*
heimischeh	*homely*
himmel	*heaven*

idiotten	*idiots*
imglick	*misfortune, tragedy*
in drerd mit zei	*to hell with them*
inzereh Yidlech	*our little Jews (Polish) (an expression of familiarity)*
jajecznica	*scrambled eggs, omelette*
kalleh-meidel	*girl of marriageable age*
Kasheh mit borsht	*a mix-up*
kein horeh	*no evil eye*
kichel	*biscuit, cookie*
kichlech	*biscuits, cookies*
kinderlech	*little children*
kirchen glocken	*church bells*
kneidlech	*dumplings*
Kol Nidrei	*emotional prayer sung to sad music on the Day of Atonement*
kutzeniu mutzeniu	*fondling*
landsleit	*compatriots, people coming from the same country or town*
l'chaim	*to life (a toast)*
lobus	*naughty boy*
loksh	*noodle*
mamme-looshn	*mother-tongue, synonym for Yiddish*
mammenyu	*dear mother*
mamzer	*bastard, also clever person or cheat*
matzos	*unleavened bread eaten on Passover*
mazel	*luck*
meeseh meshineh	*unusual death, used as a curse*
mentsh	*man, human being, also in sense of grown-up*
mentsh einer	*Oh man! What a man!*

mentshlich	*decent, humane, considerate*
mitleid mit	*sympathy with*
mootel	*gossip*
nateerlich	*naturally*
nebich	*a pity*
nebichel	*poor little fellow*
nedooveh	*alm, gift (charity)*
ness	*miracle*
nisht git iz meer	*I am sick, expression of horror*
nisht kein kleinigkeit	*it isn't a trifle*
nissim	*miracles*
noch	*also, additionally, on top of that*
ober vee long iz der sheer	*But how long will this go on? or Is there no end to it?*
och un vei	*exclamation of woe or horror*
oisvoorf	*outlaw, rotter*
oopgeheeten zol men vern	*may we be spared or protected*
Panie	*Madame or Mrs (Polish)*
paskudniaks	*nasty, filthy people*
Pesach	*Passover*
pshakrev	*equiv. to son of a bitch*
punkt	*just, exactly*
roizen	*roses*
Rosh Hashono	*Jewish New Year*
Seder	*religious service and traditional festive meal at home on the first two nights of Passover*
shah	*hush, or be quiet*
sheigetz	*Gentile boy, also a cheek, smart aleck, hooligan*
sheigetzl	*little Gentile boy*
shikseh	*Gentile girl*
shkootzim	*Gentile boys*
shlepping	*dragging*
shlimazel	*unlucky one, ne'er-do-well*

shmaltz-top	*pot of dripping*
shmendrik	*stupid or awkward person*
shmoozer	*one who gets round you*
shoin	*already*
shtill zol zein	*be quiet*
shnorrers	*beggars, cadgers*
Sholem Aleichem	*greeting between Jews (lit. peace unto you); also the pen-name of famous Yiddish writer*
simche	*rejoicing, festival, joyful occasion or gathering*
smarkatch	*snotty-nose (Polish)*
Sovietn Farband (or Ratn-Farband)	*Soviet Union*
sympatisch	*charming, appealing*
tareram	*row, uproar, fuss*
teierinka	*dear one*
tsooress	*trouble*
tsufreeden	*satisfied, contented*
yenem's	*other people's*
Yiddelech	*Jews (used in a folksy sense)*
Yiddishkeit	*Jewishness (also in a broader sense as applying to customs and ethical concepts)*
yok	*yokel, coarse word for Gentile*
Yom Kippur	*Day of Atonement*
Yomtoivim	*holy days*
zets	*bang*

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